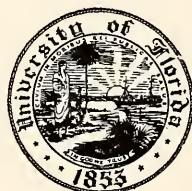


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NOT WITH THE FIST

Mexican-Americans in a Southwest City



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NOT WITH THE FIST

Mexican-Americans in a Southwest City

RUTH D. TUCK

In the same way wrongs that afflict society are seldom willed by anyone or any group, but are by-products of acts of will having other objects; they are done, as someone has said, with the elbows rather than the fists.

CHARLES HORTON COOLEY,
—*Social Organization*

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first edition



PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

W. L. B.

TO
MICHAEL

FOREWORD

OVER two years ago, Los Angeles, the city with the second largest Mexican population in the world, had a Roman holiday of lawless disorder. During the days of June 5, 6, and 7, 1943, the United States, the champion abroad of decency, could blush and hang its head at home. Fanned by press and radio propaganda, given the nod by city and county police, servicemen hunted down Mexican "zoot suiters" with the terrible quixotism of the mob. Un-neighborliness between Americans of Anglo and Americans of Hispanic descent mounted. The smoke signals were up.

Alarmed city, state, and federal authorities moved to douse the conflagration. Responsible national periodicals castigated Los Angeles. Notes were exchanged between the Mexican Embassy and the State Department, but it was revealed that those hurt and abused were not Mexican citizens, but American-born of Mexican descent. It was not a "Mexican" problem. It was an American one.

Today, the average citizen of this country remembers, concerning Mexican-Americans, only that there was a riot and that much had been said about "zoot suiters." But in Los Angeles and the Southwest, the dominant groups, in the pangs of a hangover from the Roman holiday, found themselves the possessors of a belated discovery: Mexican-Americans had worth.

There were 375,000 of them in the armed forces. One out of every two heads of households had left their homes—to fight, to farm, to work, to build ships and planes, and to die. The lists of citations with Hispanic names ran long in big city dailies and little country weeklies alike. Every community found it had these little Americans of worth. It found them living on the other side of the tracks, "ill-housed, ill-fed, ill-clothed."

In Los Angeles, out of the guilt of the dominant group, arose a fadism for the Mexican-American. Committees gave birth to

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litters of other committees. Co-ordinator battled co-ordinator. There was a new set of resolutions every morning. Still, when the emotional fever and the defensiveness subsided, few real gains had been made for or by the Mexican-American group. They were basically where they had been for twenty-five years, and the flare of faddish interest was dying.

Yet some good things remain out of the confusion. Because of them, it seems to me the "zoot suit" riots were a blessing, even tragically disguised. First, many Anglo-Americans see, as they never did before, that the American of Hispanic descent must be brought into the main current of American life and so into the emerging new life of the world. If this is not done, these little Americans and all the other little Americans we call minorities will drag a dead weight in both currents. Second, Mexican-Americans are becoming mildly inoculated with the idea that they must walk the first mile—aggressively, as they have not done before. And last, there are being placed some guideposts for the future in the form of studies and research regarding the American of Mexican descent.

There has been an appalling dearth of information concerning the Mexican immigrant and the American of Mexican descent. Of those studies made in years past, most fell into major faults. Some were rigidly scholastic, coldly quantitative things of charts and graphs. The "Mexican problem" showed its skeleton, but there was no flesh and movement. Others were narrowly regional and of interest mainly to collectors of folklore. Many, far too many, dripped with an overdose of sentimentality and human kindness—much ado about that artistic, musical, quaint, and talented Mexican.

It is hard to get underneath the surface of a life and of a group in which you have not been brought up. It is hard when you *are* a member of that group, too—and still harder to see straight. The author of *Not with the Fist* has given us a rounded exposition of the way millions of our little Americans live and move and have their being. She has "got underneath." We Mexican-Americans will recognize it for the truth it is. Some of us may rise in defensive disclaimers of our faults, but it seems to me that the author could have hit us much harder on matters like timid leadership,

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class snobbery, an ineffectual press, *Mexicanismo* and the role of the consulates. It would have been useful to us.

And the author could have been harsher with the dominant community. The conflict between Anglo and Hispanic groups in the Southwest is not as much the working of unconscious forces as she makes it seem. There is deliberated action and premeditated cruelty.

Still, the great merit of the book is that the reader can see a complex of forces at work. Not only the forces which are regional and historical, but those national—even international—and contemporary, rub against one another in "Descanso." The sparks they produce and the flames which arise are burning, multiplied a thousandfold, throughout the United States. *Not with the Fist*, with perceptive feeling, sets the story of some little Americans into the larger picture. The Mexican-Americans need to know this larger framework. The dominant group needs to *feel* it, with its overtones of tragic prophecy.

The smoke from the many battlefields of the world is clearing. We hope we can set ourselves to outwitting the tragic prophecy, to rebuilding our society so that the forces at work in it do not rub with such heated friction or light so many dangerous fires. Every Southwest community has in it young men, formerly "little" Americans but who were able to act as complete Americans for three to four years. They know what it is to be released from the minority burden. They find it a heavy one to be asked to pick up again, on the other side of the tracks in a Southwest city. I am often tempted to say to them, "Go away! Go to another part of the United States!" There are places where there is no prejudice against the Mexican-American, and where they could keep for the rest of their lives the precious feeling of integration and belonging. But they would find that there was prejudice against Americans—of Jewish, or Chinese, or Negro, or Polish, or Italian extraction. They would still be living in a cracked, split, flawed society.

It is as destructive to be an oppressor as it is to be the oppressed. Escape? There is none. But there *can* be a resolution.

IGNACIO L. LÓPEZ.

Pomona, California.

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IN THE Southwest, persons of Mexican descent and extraction are as familiar a part of the surroundings as mesas, cactus, and those washes called rivers. In this area, which once belonged to imperial Spain and later to the fledgeling Mexican republic, the names of cities, streets, and localities are reminders of the historic tie with a Hispanic civilization. One can hear Spanish spoken on street corners, in soda-fountains, on school playgrounds. Words like *dinero* and *casa* and *frijoles* have crept into the vocabulary of the average resident, as have antique dishes like *tamales* and *tortillas* into his cuisine, and the semi-enclosed garden, called a *patio*, into his house plan. He is accustomed to seeing faces as natively American as those which greeted Cortez on his march to Mexico City—as well as faces as Hispanic as that of the conqueror himself—on buses, in stores, and on the streets of every town. As long as there have been Americans in the Southwest, they have had as neighbors representatives of the great cultural blend of Latin America—that of the ancient Indian civilizations and the European culture of Spain. One might expect that Anglo-Americans in this section of the country, through long-continued contacts in their communities, might have unusual appreciation and understanding of the other half of the hemisphere. Unfortunately, this has not been the case, for the Anglo-American has viewed his immediate neighbors of Latin descent through a rather peculiar pair of spectacles, refracted so as to limit vision sharply in certain directions and tinted so as to shadow the whole vista.

Persons of Mexican origin and descent, resident in the United States, have acquired the label of "minority." Some of them are the descendants of families resident in the territory long before the United States had any title to it. Some are immigrants who came from Mexico twenty-five or thirty years ago. A great many

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of them are the second or third generation sons of these immigrants. With slight exception, they are lumped together under the blanket term Mexican, with the qualifying appellation Mexican-American added as a distinct afterthought. The unqualified title American is very seldom used in regard to them. In the minds of their fellow Americans of other descent, they are Mexicans, so to remain generation after generation. And they are a minority in that distinct connotation of the word which concerns itself only secondarily with numbers and chiefly with limitation of opportunity and civil rights. "A minority," wrote a Mexican-American schoolboy, "is somebody everyone else thinks is different and worse."

There are also persons of Mexican origin and descent in every state of the Union and large groupings of them in some midwest and eastern industrial cities. Sometimes, these escape the minority label altogether, at other times they receive no more of it than applies to persons of Italian, Czech, or Polish descent. In some places, they are considered vaguely exotic and romantic, more so than the European immigrant. In others, they are spoken of disapprovingly as dark and barely escape the barriers which apply to the Negro. Throughout the Southwest, they are generally thought of as being above the Negro and probably above the native Indian, but certainly below the Anglo-American. The interesting thing about all the foregoing, with its preoccupation with gradings and groupings, is that the Mexican-American does not provoke a reaction which might be attributed, primarily, to a "conflict of cultures"—a contrast between Latin- and Anglo-American ways of life. Rather, he is a recipient of some generalized attitudes toward those of different ethnic, national, or economic backgrounds; he is one of many groups figuring in a great game of status determination, where cultural distinctions, real or fancied, often serve as pretexts.

Certain facets of this story of a California city and its Mexican-Americans might have been true of Boston and its Irish, Chicago and its Italians, Detroit and its Poles—or California itself with its Okies. Other aspects are reminiscent of the treatment of the Negro throughout the United States, or of the Oriental. There is an echo of the attitude of the conquering pioneer toward the na-

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tive American Indian. Equally, some of the scapegoating directed toward the Mexican-American sounds like that clustered around the Jewish minority in some Atlantic seaboard states. The same tensions which produced riot psychology in "Descanso," California, broke forth in overt and serious action in Detroit, Beaumont, Los Angeles, and other places; and the pattern was the same, regardless of the ethnic or cultural composition of the group toward which it was directed. One cannot, however much it would simplify the problem, place the Mexican-American group to one side and say: "Here is a minority in which the only problem is that of ways of life, of cultural difference." One would be far nearer the truth in saying that the problem was one of reconciling a conflict within our own culture.

True, some genuine cultural differences exist. Twenty-five or thirty years ago, when we were receiving the bulk of our immigration from Mexico, the differences were many. And there still exist little backwater communities in the Southwest, like the Rio Grande villages of New Mexico or the *paisano* settlements of Northern California, where one may see descendants of colonial Mexicans preserving some ways of life which were in existence before 1848. But the bulk of our three million or so persons of Mexican descent share, widely, our patterns of living—most of their ways are ours, just as most of the ways of the Italian-American, the Nisei, and the Negro are ours. Adjustment to life in Mexico would be almost as difficult for an American of Mexican descent as it would for an American of Polish descent, or Irish, or Scandinavian. Whatever the process is—and it is assuredly more complex than those concepts of it which we blanket under the term Americanization, it is a fact that our second-generation Americans are bone and flesh of our culture. And their fathers are much more so than we usually give them credit for being.

It is rather a pity that so little has been studied of the process by which this learning of a new set of habits took place. Such studies do not wait on time. The immigrant group in the process of learning our ways is as subject to disappearance as the bison or the woodland caribou. Even the Mexican who came as an immigrant in the period 1920-1930 has long since passed the stage

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where the greater part of such a process is directly observable. It has to be reconstructed from his reminiscences, and those are fading with time. Had we made such studies, we might not only have collected some valuable data regarding the changes which take place when a group learns new living habits, but we might also have gained some precious insights into our own culture.

It has become a truism to say that those living within a culture are least able to judge and evaluate it—they are too close to it, too much a part of it. Why is something right and something else, very like it, wrong? Why does one feel at home in certain situations and vaguely ill at ease in others? These are questions which even trained observers, schooled to a dispassionate and objective approach, have difficulty in answering, because, from childhood, they have been formed by the society they are attempting to analyze. But it might be possible to analyze one's own culture by its manifestations, by the impact which it makes on those whose conditioning has been different, who have been formed by other social forces. Some hidden and serious defects might come to light, in which one could recognize the seeds of future disaster. And, by the same token, there might be potentialities, hardly suspected and scarcely developed, which when properly nurtured could open great vistas of achievement. The bird's-eye view has certain advantages. But the view from underneath may have greater implications. It is here that the roots are, the unsprouted seeds, the fertile or arid soil. Such a view the members of our minority groups can give us. They have felt the impact; they have grown in certain directions or been retarded in others in accordance with the pressures exerted on them; from their reactions, displayed in their life histories, we might be able to see ourselves with clearer vision.

That this book accomplishes anything of the sort I do not pretend. Such a task does not lie within the province of one observer, one study, or one book. I can only throw out such hints as came my way. The principal effort in this book was directed toward adding a little segment of information to the general subject of minority and race relations, by showing them in operation in a city small enough to constitute a test-tube where forces are easily discernible. I also wished to collect, in easily assimilable form,

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some sound information regarding the ways of life of a minority group which has been rather generally brushed aside and overlooked. If the Mexican-American comes to the attention of the United States in general only when he is needed in the employment market, when he constitutes a public-assistance problem, when his young are either involved in "zoot suit" disturbances or distinguishing themselves gloriously at Corregidor or Anzio, it is safe to say that he comes to the attention of the resident of the Southwest not much more frequently. When there is a crisis, he is a problem and the subject of a great deal of conferring and good resolutions. When no crisis exists, he is forgotten.

That he furnishes an important key to our relations with the southern half of this hemisphere is a fact of which the country at large, including the Southwest, is not yet aware. It has become almost axiomatic today to say that no minority problem is merely regional or even national in scope. The currency of the axiom by no means alters its essential truth. We all know that continued friendship and active co-operation with Latin America is a mutual necessity. It depends, to a greater degree than most persons realize, upon our treatment of Latin-American minorities within the United States. Our sins of omission and commission toward these minorities make headlines in Latin-American capitals. Letters fly southward over our border, people go back to visit relatives, and official visitors here sometimes have sharp eyes. There is a whole body of unpleasant fact which circulates from Mexico southward, carried by commercial travelers, consular officials, newspapers, and letters, regarding our treatment of our population of Latin descent. And there is a realistic tendency to judge the validity of our international intentions by what we do in our own backyard. When we puzzle over those complex situations in which we could not force co-operation, big and powerful as we are, or buy it with all our money—when we are greeted with polite mistrust below the border, we might remember that a key to part of the puzzle is kicking around at home.

"Descanso," the small city in which this study of Mexican-Americans was made, grew up in a period when the world seemed very large and not at all interrelated. It was possible for Descanso to think of itself as the hub of a little universe, bounded by the

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county of which it was the seat. That its actions and attitudes had implications which might reverberate in Mexico City, or Chungking, or Moscow, or Milan was simply inconceivable. It is not so inconceivable today, but Descanso finds adjustment to this new idea difficult to make. There were many reasons for selecting "Descanso" as a site for study, but among them was the provocative consideration that this youthful city, in its comparatively short life, has witnessed some amazing revolutions in technology and world outlooks. It has jumped from pioneer ox-carts in its streets to jet-planes in its airfield, like many a town in the Southwest, within the lifetime of its oldest residents. Small wonder that it has some psychological growing pains.

It has proved impossible not to speak of Descanso as if it had a personality, nor of its small alter-ego, the Mexican-American colony, as if it, too, had a personality. Strictly speaking, of course, no community or group of persons has a personality. But cities do have tempos and majority attitudes. We all recognize it when we speak of a "bustling town," a "conservative city," a "wide-open place," or a "great church town." There are valid techniques for determining what these attitudes are. How a community expresses itself in time of crisis; which sentiments it listens to with approval and which it discards; what it records in civic meetings; what it talks about at luncheon clubs, in assembly lines, cafés, soda-fountains, bars, buses, on street corners and playgrounds; what it reads and what it says about its reading: from these and other similar sources a judgment can be reached as to its majority attitudes. Techniques akin to mass observation are useful in picking up this reflection of community opinion, as are questionnaires and interviews, carefully distributed so as to cover age, sex, occupational, and class groupings. Such methods were used in appraising dominant Descanso.

In the Mexican-American settlement, the *colonia*, some of these techniques were also used, but more revealing were found to be methods analogous to those of the cultural anthropologists. For some eighteen months, I was spectator and participant in the daily life of the *colonia*, at occasions ranging from informal family gatherings to full-dress public celebrations. Throughout this time, informants, selected so as to represent with some fidelity

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the various groupings of the *colonia*, were interviewed repeatedly—although interview is probably too pretentious a word for the pleasant, casual, apparently aimless conversations through which much of the material was secured. The life story was found particularly useful in tracing the immigrant's initiation into American life, and also in probing the problems and ambitions of youth.

While every effort was made to conduct the preliminary study in accordance with sound scientific precepts, and continual advantage was taken of the expert guidance so generously offered by advisors, conversely, in the actual writing of the book, every effort was made to keep it free of the "academic taint." I wanted many of its readers to be those who work directly with Mexican-Americans—employers, schoolteachers, law-enforcement officers, social workers, church leaders, parent-teacher groups, union officials, public agency employees, and others in the communities of the Southwest and elsewhere. These are persons who know little, by and large, of the background, ways of life, and aspirations, of their Mexican-American neighbors, yet who exercise a determinant influence upon them at many points. Without any sacrifice of essential fact and concept, the book could, I felt, read somewhat like a story—the story of a town and its residents—with its beginnings in the historic past, its climax synchronizing with world-wide climax, and its denouement in the hands of the readers.

The community called Descanso had many things to recommend it for a study of this sort. In size, it represents a unit midway between the small town and the large city. It is free from the unwieldy complexities of the latter, yet displays the characteristics of an urban community. Its Mexican-American community has a press, a radio program, a business district, and numerous associations. The employment of the bulk of the Mexican-American population, prior to the war, struck a fairly even balance between railroad and agricultural work. Descanso is neither an agricultural backwater nor a highly industrialized town. In tone and temperament, it is felt, Descanso represents a western community—similar to other small cities in Arizona and Texas—rather than the California city which often had its beginnings as

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a sanatorium for the over-aged. Its Mexican-American population is predominantly an immigrant population, not one, as in New Mexico, traditionally rooted in the locality.¹ Yet there are sufficient numbers of descendants of colonial Mexicans living in Descanso to give its story a continuity beginning many decades back. While the experiences of Descanso hold true for many towns in the Southwest, it is also true that regional differences in attitudes—such as those developing from the large Negro population of Texas—exist. They have been emphasized in many an immigrant life story. But I feel that these differences are, basically, matters of emphasis. In some localities, the position of the Mexican-American is considerably more disadvantaged than in Descanso; in other localities, it is somewhat improved. However, the attitudes which cluster around him have great similarity throughout the Southwest—more important, they have a fundamental origin in the attitudes which the United States, at large, holds toward national and ethnic minorities.

The community studied has been called Descanso, not merely because no city named Descanso exists in the United States—although there are several hamlets and villages of this name—but because the name has a symbolic meaning. A *descanso*, in the days of Spanish exploration, was a spot at which parties stopped to refresh themselves for a few days before striking out into the wilderness ahead. In this sense, the community of Descanso is a resting-place for the Mexican immigrant in his transition from a traditional, rural pattern of life to that demanded by his enmeshment in an industrialized society. For his sons, Descanso is a stop-over on the journey toward complete assimilation into and acculturation with American society. And of dominant Descanso, it may be said to be on the road leading from the carelessly arrogant attitudes of the past to the newer concept of a society in which every citizen will have freedom for development. Like the exploration parties of old, it finds the landmarks strange and the trail confusing—but the vistas ahead are wide.

¹ Because the situation of the person of Mexican descent in New Mexico, particularly in its northern sections, offers some special aspects of cultural homogeneity, consideration of his problem does not enter into the Descanso study.

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The title for the book, *Not with the Fist*, has been taken from an observation of the sociologist, Charles Horton Cooley:

In the same way wrongs that afflict society are seldom willed by anyone or any group, but are by-products of acts of will having other objects; they are done, as someone has said, with the elbows rather than the fists. There is surprisingly little ill-intent, and the more one looks into life the less he finds of that vivid chiaroscuro of conscious goodness and badness his childish teaching has led him to expect.²

It has seemed that the key to dominant Descanso's attitudes and actions lay in the fact that they were not premeditated, or deliberately cruel. They were compounded, rather, from ingredients of self-interest, careless assurance, and impulsive action. That is why they seem right and natural to the bulk of Descanso's people, who, in their own words, "wouldn't set out to be mean." Because they have elbowed their way to dominance, they do not feel the bad conscience which might have resulted from use of the fist.

A further word regarding terminology is perhaps necessary. Words are important in minority and racial questions—the careless use of a lower-case letter in discussing the Negro would now constitute a fatal error. A casual word, "Chinaman," would today be an insulting solecism to the group concerned. Persons of Mexican origin and extraction object strongly to the classification of "Mexican, Negro, and white," not because they are ashamed of Mexican origin, but because they consider this terminology a sign of exclusion from the dominant group. "Americans and Mexicans" is not only legally incorrect, from the point of view of citizenship, in many cases, but it also carries the connotation of exclusion. One might correctly designate the Mexican-American group as "persons of Mexican origin and Americans of Mexican descent," but this is not a phrase which fits handily into sentence structure. And, furthermore, how should one characterize the other group? As Americans of what descent? Of "polyglot," possibly, but that is hardly a term which the general reading public will accept easily. I have fallen back on a circumlocution which, while ethnologically incorrect, is in common use throughout the Southwest and seems to give less

² Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Organization*, Scribner, 1913, p. 400.

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offense than other classifications. It is that of "Anglo-American" and "Mexican-American." It unfortunately carries a strong odor of the North European superiority complex, but it seems to constitute the best compromise under the circumstances.³ Wherever the context permits, however, the classification of "Mexican-Americans and other Americans" is used, as approximating most closely the effect desired.

It is the writer's profound hope that this book will play a small part in producing a community where it is no longer necessary to invent terms for splitting up citizens into racial and national islands, where there will be no linguistic devices for emphasizing social isolation and difference, and where the term "American" will serve for everyone. But, to produce such a national society, it may be necessary to progress toward world society where people are thought of primarily as members of a common human species—and only secondarily as products of geography and culture. Such a world may be far distant, but it could be closer than we think.

³ There is some dictionary sanction for the use of "Anglo-American" in this sense. *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, fourth edition, Merriam Company, 1935, gives the following secondary meaning: "also (in central western U.S.A.) any child whose parents were born in America and speak English."

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NOT WITH THE FIST

Mexican-Americans in a Southwest City

CHAPTER I

PIONEERS

The Setting

DESCANSO is a small western city, set in a fertile valley, half cupped by mountains. It is a junction for two major railroad lines, and the bulk of its employment has always come from railroad operation, maintenance, and repair. However, the irrigated valleys behind Descanso furnish the bulk of the railroads' freight. Descanso is set in an agricultural region, in an agricultural state whose farm operations are large-scale, highly organized, and in perennial need of a floating army of cheap farm labor. Railroads and ranching—until the advent of war industry—set the tempo for Descanso's economy.

Descanso's growth has been recent and rapid. It was a village in 1880, a large small town in 1910, and has become a city within the memory of residents under middle age. Civic planning has been helter-skelter, or non-existent, both as to physical aspects and essential services, lacks which Descanso felt under the impact of a war boom. But Descanso has always been a boom town, except for brief periods of depression which it remembers with a shudder. It is geared to growth and expansion, to unreflective bustle.

Physically, Descanso is not a beautiful town, for all its setting of mountains. Neither, however, is it an eyesore. Its streets are laid out in uncompromising grid pattern over the flat floor of the valley, and its home architecture runs a gamut from jerry-built frame structures to dazzling "Hollywood Spanish." Its business blocks are a jumble of hole-in-the-wall stores and larger office and store buildings of varying vintage. It has slum areas of shacks and miles of cheap housing destined to be either slums or blighted areas very soon. But for all its architectural sins,

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Descanso's wide, wind-swept streets, its bright lawns and shrubs, the clear air and sunny skies, give it an air of freshness and newness. Seen from the mountain pass above, it looks like a toy town laid out by children—as though it could be taken up and laid out afresh in a day. But when you are in Descanso, the mountains look, not eternal, but like a painted backdrop for the manifold busy activities of the town.

Ecologically, Descanso is not patterned and stratified like eastern cities. It is still well mixed up, with pioneer families living next door to dry-cleaning establishments, quick-fry shacks next to "exclusive" women's stores, banks a few steps from bordellos. The only recognizable pattern it has exhibited to date is to favor residential growth toward the north and east, up against the wall of the mountains. The parts of town to the south and west contain, with some exceptions, the slums, the blighted housing, the cheap auto courts, and the struggling neighborhood businesses. There is practical reason for the preference. The southern section, once a favored residential district, is the debouchement of a flood area from the mountains; it has been under water many times. The western section is also in the path of flood waters, and in addition was once a mass of *tulares*, small, springy swamps. These sections are now reserved for the less economically favored; the racial minorities and the newcomers from the central South—the Okies and Arkies.

The southern section, known as the Spring Valley district, boasts a swampy park, so favored by drunks and prostitutes that it is hardly suitable for other citizens. Below the park lies what is known as "the old part of town." Some of Descanso's best families used to live there, and a few spacious, if dilapidated, two-story houses stand out in the huddle of shacks and cheap bungalows. The district is now inhabited, in about equal parts, by Mexican-Americans, impoverished whites, and Negroes. Many of the Mexican-Americans are descendants of Mexican colonial families who lived in this area long before there was a Descanso; others are more recent immigrants from Mexico. For the immigrant whites, Spring Valley is an unpleasant stopover on the way to better housing. For the Negroes, it is almost the only housing they can get.

PIONEERS

The western section, known as the Monticello district, from the name of its principal street, was not built up until after the railroad shops came into that section. Monticello Avenue had been an old wagon road leading from ranching settlements to the mountain pass. As late as 1910, a great deal of the land was still in three or four large farming tracts, not too suitable for farming because of the danger of flood, and not too rosy a residential investment in a city which persisted in growing the other way. When Mexican railroad workers began to come in, from 1910 to 1920, the investors seized at the opportunity to put up rows of cheap frame houses for rent or sale. The story is told, probably apocryphally, that the railroad even supplied lumber and paint at cut rates—whole blocks would be one dull blaze of "Santa Fe red." In any event, it has been a profitable individual investment—if not a profitable civic one—with its combination of low initial cost, no maintenance, and a perpetual list of renters who had nowhere else to go.

On both sides of Monticello Avenue, a small Mexican business district has grown up—cafés, grocery stores, *cantinas*,¹ a barber shop, a bakery, a drugstore, and a couple of *tortillerias*.² The hiring and provisioning agency for the Santa Fe is also here. Much of the life of the Mexican-American colony centers on this street, and the colony itself is larger, more homogeneous, and more progressive than the smaller group in Spring Valley. The district has one or two Italian families, a few Filipinos, and recently the area has experienced a considerable invasion of Negro families from its east end, close to the railroad tracks. Practically no Anglo-Americans live in the heart of the district, although, toward the north, Mexican-Americans of higher economic status are beginning to occupy houses on streets with Anglo-Americans.

More important, however, than the physical setting in Descanso is the psychological. Descanso is a comparatively new city, even for the United States, but it already carries its burden of memories and attitudes from the past. Like an individual, a community is what it is in the present because of what happened to it in the past. Its experiences have shaped it, not only for today,

¹ *cantina*: a bar or saloon.

² *tortilleria*: a shop where *tortillas*, unleavened pancakes, are sold.

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but for many tomorrows. It is comparatively easy to tear down housing and zone city blocks. It is not easy at all to change the emotional sets that cling to us from the past.

The Salt of the Earth

If you come overland by train to Descanso, you have to pass through a long stretch of desert. From your window you see endless sweeps of sky and sand, broken only by rocky escarpments as naked as bones. A constant wind, apparently coming from nowhere and going nowhere, whistles through the echoing spaces, whirling dust devils with it. The vegetation is stunted and huddles close to the ground, except for the wild, distorted profile of an occasional Joshua tree against the skyline, "the most repulsive tree in the vegetable kingdom." Over it all, the sun casts a piercing, malignant eye, like a giant searchlight.

The little towns along the right-of-way look like outposts in enemy territory. A big, and most essential, water tank dominates each one. Some drooping chinaberry trees by the station make a pool of dusty shade. There is a glimpse of a short street where signs for Joe's Lunch, Mac's Garage and the five-and-ten quiver in the wind, and another glimpse of frame dwellings entrenched behind swaying windbreaks. If you look back, the little town is no more than a blur on the sand. The desert looks endless again.

To understand the city of Descanso, you have to keep the desert in mind. For although Descanso is shut off from the desert by a half-circle of steep mountains and lies in a fertile valley, it can be approached from the major part of the United States only by a journey through desert country which, even with the conveniences of today, seems interminable. In the middle of the last century, such a journey was a dangerous and heroic feat. It was a mortal struggle with nature—with alkali wastes, with disappearing rivers and dried springs, with sandstorms, hostile aborigines, vanishing trails, and lost landmarks. It took hardihood and courage of a high order. It took shrewd intelligence to plot a course where the penalty for a mistake was death. Small wonder that the men and women who survived this journey would appear to their descendants as cast in heroic, almost superhuman,

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mold. And didn't the ordeal by desert give them a mandate to rule the promised land beyond the mountain passes, even to the third and fourth generations?

In the wheat fields of Nebraska or in the pine forests around the Great Lakes, the pioneer tradition has become dim. The people who could tell about the old days first hand have been gone for two generations. Their memories live in bronze plaques on park statuary or in the humdrum proceedings of historical societies.

Some day this will be true in Descanso, but it is not so now. Descanso is too close in time to its beginnings not to feel itself still a part of them. Many of its older leaders are the sons of "old Parker" or "the old doc" or similar old ones, who made the trip around the Horn or the Utah trek; stories of pioneer suffering and heroism, as well as pioneer lawlessness and greed, are a part of their intimate childhood memories. There are men and women still living in Descanso who can remember it as a little cluster of adobe houses, where a few slightly larger structures made up the "business block." It was only thirty years ago that a volunteer posse was called up to pursue and capture a "bad Indian." Many a substantial businessman spent his youth wrangling mules through the alkali flats or driving a herd of cattle to the next water hole, where it was hardly worthy of comment to pick up a shattered ox yoke or a few whitened human bones.

The speech of the cattle trail and the mining camp, only slightly overlaid with Kiwanis and Lions' slogans, crops up in many a civic meeting and business conference. Descanso takes pride in a bluff, hearty, common-sense approach. "This is a town where we lay our cards right on the table," I was told many times. Of course, Descanso does not put all its cards down any more than some of its poker-playing forebears did—some of the most interesting cards seem to be carefully tucked up sleeves—but Descanso likes to think of itself as being forthright and outspoken at all costs. "Let the tail go with the hide," is another of Descanso's sayings, indicating that it isn't petty or inclined to haggle over small details. "You can tell a man by the way he acts when the chips are down." "He isn't one who'll get under and push." "That won't keep us in bacon—but, hell, we gave up

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bacon and got down to prunes long ago." This was the speech of Descanso's Heroic Age. Its phrases fall with authority from the lips of the sons and grandsons of the pioneers, and from them Descanso gets its picture of itself as a careless, free-handed, live town. To a great extent the picture is true. Descanso's greatest charm is its vitality, even though its energy, like that of an adolescent, often expends itself in irritating blind rushes.

It may be that Descanso, like some adolescents, has a parent fixation. Its parents are those bearded men and robust women whose pictures appear in the newspapers on civic anniversaries. Descanso cannot forget its debt to them. They were the ones who got under the wagons and pushed, and who lived on prunes—or jerky and roots—when there was no bacon. Descanso has only to look to the north to see the precipitous mountain trail down which wagon trains came, wheels chained and sliding, pine trees lashed behind to check the downward rush. The desert wind that blows through the pass is the same one that blew ninety years ago, parching the tongues of the heroic wanderers. They were not all saints, as Descanso well knows, but even their faults now have an epic quality. Like a son who tries to emulate a famous father, Descanso is inclined to imitate the faults almost as much as the virtues. What was good enough for the fathers must be good enough for the grandsons, and Descanso has been notably backward in applying modern cures for its many urban problems. Its flourishing red-light district, which existed until the advent, in 1941, of large military establishments in the vicinity, is still considered in many quarters to have been a man's solution of a man's problem. Descanso is perennially suspicious of "frills" in civic service, for after all the forefathers got along without them, and they were Nature's aristocrats.

Nature's aristocrats become the actual aristocrats of Descanso's developing society. It is perhaps puzzling that a fluid, heterogeneous mixture of people from everywhere, in a little frontier village, should have so soon developed a ruling class. But in a community where it was bad form to question previous origins, where nearly all occupations were manual, and where education and polished manners were often handicaps, one thing was left by which to determine status—when you had arrived. It generally

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fell out that those who had arrived first had a more substantial grip on the resources of the valley than those who arrived later, so presently a modest degree of wealth was added to enhance the prestige of having got there early. When county and city governments were set up, there were ruling families ready to rule.

Out of the hundred and sixty names listed as belonging to the Pioneer Society in 1906, very few are obscure in Descanso today. To read through lists of city and county officials in Descanso for the past eighty years is to read the same names in varying combinations, plus the names of sons-in-law, nephews, poor relations, and protégés. "It will be a long time after you're dead that we won't have a B— in the court house," I was told, and certainly the third generation of B—'s appeared firmly and widely entrenched. To be a son, or even a grandson, of a pioneer has generally meant that you started at the top in Descanso.

If you could not accomplish that, it was well to be a native son of the state. A common introduction of speakers to Descanso's service clubs is: "Mr. A— is a native son and the son of a native son—and I guess I don't need to tell you he knows what he's talking about." The implication that being a native son outweighed all other considerations in ability to speak for one's community was reinforced by a state and local organization of native sons, which exercised great influence in the political and economic scene. To belong to this organization gave one the comfortable assurance of having attained, through birth, a status which "all these new people rushing in" could never hope to have. It also gave one a powerful organizational device for holding fast to whatever material advantage had accrued from early arrival. It is interesting to note that this organization declined in influence as the number of native sons—including, of course, sons of those new people who had rushed in—increased. Being a native son is fast losing its scarcity value. And many native sons, such as Indians or Mexicans (unless they could claim "old Spanish" descent), were never eligible for membership. The organization was always vociferously "white American," with the footnote added that such was the "best stock in the world."

Being of "good stock" is of importance in Descanso. It is a passport to public office, and it is an advantage in the city's financial

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circles. People of "good stock" stick together; they protect their own. Being of "good stock" will compensate for many deficiencies, including incompetence and, occasionally, outright dishonesty. "I can't believe he'd do a thing like that. He comes of such good stock," has been an apologia for some flagrant breaches of public and private trust.

To be of good stock, one must be white, and preferably "old American," Scotch, or Irish in origin—although German and Scandinavian ancestry is acceptable, if sufficiently far in the past. It is better if one's family has been known in the community for at least two generations. Persons of other antecedents may be admitted to be "smart" or "shrewd," particularly in financial matters. They may even rise to positions near the ruling oligarchy, but the accolade of coming from "good stock" is not bestowed upon them.

To be of good stock, one need not have exalted ancestors on one's family tree. In fact, it is better not to have them. Descanso still has a frontier distrust of rank, prestige, and education originating elsewhere. "Common as an old shoe" is one of the most flattering phrases that can be applied to a man, or even to a woman. It denotes that its possessor is just like everyone else, not too highly educated, not boasting any lofty origins, or "setting himself up to be somebody." In a community where fathers and grandfathers spanned mules, wielded picks, or climbed off the business end of a freight car—and everyone knows they did—claims to higher origins are a doubtful asset. Descanso is a town of plain people and proud of it.

Descanso believes with simple, naive, fervor that North Europeans and their descendants represent a superior breed of people. It has heard, rather recently, that an analogous belief, called Nordic Supremacy, has been responsible for hell's breaking loose in Europe, but it can see no real relation between that belief and its own artless conviction that white Americans of North European descent are the "salt of the earth" and entitled to rule it. It is thrown into an obstinate panic by "all this talk about races being equal." It doesn't want to hear such things. They are upsetting and embarrassing. They menace the whole status order Descanso has evolved. To bring up the subject of racial

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equality at a Descanso dinner table is to arouse the same emotional panic that a frank mention of sex would have stirred twenty years ago.

There are, of course, many individuals in Descanso who have more enlightened views, but they are chiefly members of a small educated professional class—teachers, social workers, some government employees. They represent neither the influential class in Descanso nor the bulk of its public opinion. If they constitute a leaven, it is a slow-working one. Descanso has heard very few public addresses on the subject of races and race feeling. What it has heard it has not liked. Following an address at its Junior College by a “university professor”—a suspect object, anyway—on the subject of co-operation with all races and cultures in the post-war world, Descanso buzzed with angry defensiveness.

The lecture was the talk of the town for a day, if one could judge from the comments heard in the cafés where Descanso's businessmen and office workers go for coffee, doughnuts, and gossip. “You can't tell me people aren't different. Look at the men who built this city and look at that bunch of Mexicans in the West End.” “All that talk about what science has found out. Just look around you and you'll see different.” “I'd say, treat these people fairly, but you can't expect them to come up to our standards.” “He sounded like a red to me.” “These things work themselves out in time if you don't get people all stirred up.” “Don't we educate all these people in our schools? And mighty grateful a lot of them are.” “If he's so fond of darkies, I'd like to see him marry his daughter to one.” “He used to be a preacher, I heard. They're always talking about brotherly love. I'd like to see one try and police this city.” “Now, that other talk, on the customs of China, was fine, but this stuff! It just stirs up bad feeling.” “I'd say the colored people better learn to act like white people, first.” It would be pleasant to report that some of those who constitute a leaven of public opinion raised a voice, but, if more progressive views were held, they were certainly not voiced.

Later in the day, I had occasion to call on a middle-aged businessman of mildly progressive views. He had lived in Mexico for a time and had liked the life there. He was, as he expressed it, “a great student of history,” and made a particular hobby of

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reading American history. I found him profoundly upset. He was in the act of writing down, in a "little essay," his strong objections to the previous night's lecture.

The little essay read, in part: "I can't believe anything like that! Look at the lessons of history!! The men who explored continents and brought civilizations everywhere, who made great inventions, built great cities, and reached the highest achievements man has ever reached were white man, and, except for the Greeks and Romans, men from the north of Europe. Maybe the Greeks and Romans laid the foundations, but our complex and marvelous civilization is the work of the North European. They had the grit to suffer hardships and not give up a thing until it was done. They weren't like our Latin brothers, always quarreling among themselves [sic]. They carried education with them wherever they went. There must be something about them which denotes superior ability, or they couldn't have done what they did!"

This is one view of history. It is a view upon which our schools, particularly those of this gentleman's generation, laid great emphasis. It is the view which seems right and natural to Descanso. Until rather recently, it seemed natural and right to the United States as a whole, even to its educated classes. In a country whose population was 80 per cent North European in origin, such a bias was perhaps inevitable, even though it involved considerable warping of historical fact. Every culture that has existed has laid large claims to the past—particularly to that portion of the past which was most flattering. Most people like to build up the importance of the group to which they belong—beginning with the child who says, "I'm better than anybody else, and my dad can lick your dad." Descanso's glorification of a portion of its pioneer history tied in nicely with a theory of North European superiority; in fact, Descanso built a whole status system upon this bias.

Descanso has heard that the bias is changing. "International co-operation," a "global world," a "family of nations"—all these are phrases which Descanso uses quite glibly, although with a certain provincial suspicion. It's all right to co-operate with these foreigners, it feels, but you have to watch them—they might take something away from us if we got too idealistic. And the farther

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away the whole thing stays from Descanso's own backyard the better. The philosophy of China can be studied safely and impersonally. Taking down the "white trade only" signs in Descanso is another matter. The latter action makes the whole status structure tremble. It is upsetting, and it calls forth quick, panicky resistance, like that of Descanso's coffee-drinkers and of my friend, the student of history. But Descanso has a point when it says, "You can't compare our actions with conditions in Germany. It's a different matter here." The difference may be that between premeditated, planned domination and impulsive, unthinking self-interest. It may be a difference not essentially of kind, but only of degree; nevertheless, the fact remains that, while Descanso has used its elbows pretty sharply, it has not struck with the fist.

Those "Old Spanish"

The valley of Descanso was a part of recorded history long before the first pioneer ox-carts came sliding down the northern pass. There are deserts to the south of Descanso, too, deserts which stretch southward toward the scorching heat of the tropics. Water is just as elusive and precious there, the trails as uncertain, the heat of the sun as cruel. To come from the interior of Mexico to the American Southwest involves a desert journey longer and more grueling than that of the Utah Trail. The first Spanish explorers who pressed through these arid stretches had not even the certainty of a destination to support them. They were going into a country no European had seen before. Of that particular combination of restlessness, foolhardiness, and vision which makes the human species the most foot-loose on earth, as well as the most accomplished, they had a magnificent endowment. Thanks to them, and the missionaries and settlers who followed them, American pioneers in the Southwest found a great deal of the spade-work of subduing a wilderness already accomplished.

However, to an empire as far-flung and rich as that of Spain, the northern *Provincias Internas*, of which Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California were a part, were not of major importance. The terrain was arid, sterile, and apparently lacking in

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great mineral wealth. The indigenous population was too scanty to make an impressive showing of converts to the Church and, in addition, demonstrated a fierce stubbornness. The great distances made a firm government impossible to maintain. These were the lands known as the *tierras de guerra*,³ even into the late eighteenth century. A constant administrative headache, they were important to Spain only because they were a northern frontier, a series of outposts to be held against encroaching French and English settlement.

They had about the same popularity in Mexico City as our Indian Territory had for residents of Boston. It was hard to recruit administrators and settlers for them. Few men of ability who already had a substantial stake in the settled areas near the capital were willing to risk their necks and their comfort in the wilderness. Artisans hated to leave the cities. Soldiers deserted in the dull wilderness posts. A substantial portion of every exploratory and colonizing expedition was made up of those who had nothing to lose, and prominent among these was the *mestizo*⁴ for whom the frontier offered an outlet from an underprivileged position.⁵

There were probably even churchmen who hesitated to exchange a fat see for the hard work of grubbing in a mission outpost or the painful joys of martyrdom, but in the end it was the Church which stabilized and held these lands for the Crown. Chains of small missions, held against attack by detachments of soldiers, were implanted, slowly and painfully, along the main routes of travel. From them was disseminated, not only a European faith, but a European culture, often by men who were the highest representatives of that culture. Of the courage, idealism, and intelligence of these sons of the Church much has been written, and with justice. But in the process of winning souls for the faith, they also built for themselves a great land empire, tenaciously held. Unknowing, they established for the Southwest its

³ *tierras de guerra*: lands of war, literally.

⁴ *mestizo*: a person of mixed ancestry, particularly Spanish-European and American Indian.

⁵ On the racial composition of the exploratory and colonizing expeditions, see Herbert Ingram Priestley, *The Coming of the White Man*, Macmillan, 1929, pp. 51-58; pp. 110-112; p. 203.

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pattern of large agricultural holdings, dominated from above, and dependent for functioning on a great mass of uneducated, poor, and subservient agricultural laborers.

It was late in the day when Mexico City turned its attention to lay colonization of the northern provinces. There were two precipitating factors in this decision. One was the realization, rather belated, that a thin line of missions and military posts was not sufficient to hold the area against claims by other powers. The other was the triumph in Mexico's War of Independence of a land-hungry Creole class.⁶ The great mission grants were taken from the Church, and, after some slight lip service to the idea of returning them to their original Indian owners, parceled out in huge slices to men of importance in the provinces. They were to enjoy their estates only a few years before the coming of the Americans, but the *ranchero* period was to spawn a romantic tradition of considerable vitality.

The dressed-up version of the Spanish and Mexican occupation is made much of in the Southwest today. The story of the noble, brown-robed friars with their devoted Indian flocks, of the gay, lordly Castilians who danced fandangos in great manor houses, and of the loves of beautiful (and landed) *señoritas* and virile *Americanos* is a staple of civic pageants. It is depicted in school murals, flourishes in a lush growth of popular fiction and "remiscences," and is carefully embalmed in a score of old missions and ranch houses. It is as sedulously cherished as a costume in a museum, and, like the costume, shows a tendency to crack if one examines it too carefully.

Realistic historians⁷ have pointed out for some time that the romantic tradition is compiled from some highly selective detail. The *rancheros* themselves had only a remote connection with Castile. They were colonial-born for the most part, veterans of military service or sons of minor officials. Some of them could write only their names. Some had been *sarjentos mayores* in the army, and it is certain a master sergeant in the army of imperial

⁶ *Creole*: a colonial-born person of Spanish ancestry. To be distinguished from the *mestizo*, who was the product of Spanish and Indian fusion.

⁷ An account which may be considered realistic is contained in Robert Glass Clelland's *From Wilderness to Empire, a History of California*; Knopf, 1944, chap. viii.

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Spain came from no exalted ancestry. But they were the dominant group in the provinces and they bore themselves accordingly, many times with great dignity and courage, sometimes with great arrogance. They were, however, a numerically small group, among a population majority whose connections with old Castile were even more tenuous.

It has been pointed out that expeditions to the northern provinces offered an escape for the *mestizo* who found his opportunities in the vicinity of Mexico City extremely limited. An exploratory expedition was like a miniature army. It required a great deal besides dons riding chargers. There had to be blacksmiths, herders, carpenters, carters, saddle-makers, coopers, cooks, hunters—to mention only a few necessary classifications. There had to be rank-and-file soldiers. A colonizing expedition required even more auxiliary personnel. For a *ranchero* to be able to claim more than eleven leagues, the size of the individual grant, he had to produce colonists, at least twelve families of them. As the size of a grant could be increased in proportion as the number of colonists was augmented, there was, naturally enough, keen competition for settlers. Here again was an opportunity for the *mestizo*, for the soldier who had married an Indian wife, for the *castizo*,⁸ the *morisco*,⁹ the *chino*,¹⁰ and all those other products of racial amalgamation, the mere naming of which taxed the vocabularies of Spanish census-takers.

By the time the colonization of the northern provinces began in earnest, racial and cultural fusion had been going on in Mexico for some three hundred years. It has been estimated that no more than 300,000 Spaniards ever came to Mexico and that most of them were men. The indigenous population of Mexico City alone was 300,000, and it was a small part of the total Indian population. The most robust Castilian gene, in such a situation, could hardly be expected to survive, unchanged, to populate

⁸ *castizo*: the offspring of a *mestizo* and a Spanish woman. (Original usage, Spanish—of noble, or pure descent.)

⁹ *morisco*: the offspring of a mulatto and a Spanish woman. (Original usage—of Moorish descent.)

¹⁰ *chino*: the offspring of a *salta atrás*, a throwback to Negro genes, and an Indian woman. By derivation, it is applied to a person with curly hair. (Original usage—Chinese.)

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Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California with descendants of "pure Spanish ancestry." But such is the fiction the romantic tradition likes to maintain.

Neither could Spanish culture have been expected to remain untouched, although it dominated the Indian cultures. A great deal of racial intermixture took place through concubinage, a situation in which the Indian mother was in a position to pass her cultural heritage to her children. The social organization of the many villages in the Aztec confederacy did not disappear overnight, cruelly as it was often suppressed. It survives in Mexico today, inextricably mixed and interwoven with the European culture of the conqueror.¹¹ As a matter of fact, the Spanish objection to the Indian was neither racial nor cultural. It was theological. There was little feeling against marriage with an Indian woman, if she were Christianized. Even Spanish gentlemen of rank took such wives.¹² The economic exploitation of the Indian, through the *encomienda*¹³ system, had a theological rather than a racial base per se. The conquering Spaniard was a practical man. If a useful indigenous practice could be divorced from connection with a pagan religion, he showed no hesitancy about adopting it.

Consider the ubiquitous *tortilla*, the ground-corn pancake which was the staple food of the exploratory expeditions and of every *ranchero* kitchen. It did not come out of a cook book from Madrid, but straight from an Aztec grinding-stone. It is as much pre-Conquest as the pyramids of Teotihuacán, but old Don Ricardo S—, the patriarch of Descanso Rancho, ate tortillas, plain or dressed up as *gorditas*¹⁴ and *enchiladas*,¹⁵ every day of his life.

¹¹ For an account of a Mexican community where such survivals linger, see Robert Redfield, *Tepoztlan, a Mexican Village*, University of Chicago Press, 1930.

¹² Visual evidence of such marriages is furnished by old portraits. Two of them are reproduced in Priestley's *The Coming of the White Man*, shown in the full plate opposite page 112.

¹³ *encomienda*: a system whereby a landholder was given Indian laborers, to whose services he was entitled while he instructed them in Christian principles. The system, intended to serve as a transition for the Indian to Spanish citizenship and to be of reasonably brief duration, actually formed the basis for long-continued semi-slavery.

¹⁴ *gordita*: a *tortilla* made with shortening.

¹⁵ *enchilada*: a *tortilla* stuffed with meat or cheese (usually) and served with a chile sauce.

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He probably knew as little of their origin as the slumming parties who enthusiastically eat them in Descanso's restaurants today as "Spanish food." So is it with many culture traits which are blithely described in the Southwest as "old Spanish." They have more than a trace of "old American Indian," just as the settlers of the *ranchero* period had more than a trace of Indian genes.

At the height of the *ranchero* period, Descanso Valley and vicinity contained about a hundred and seventy Mexicans. There were seven *ranchero* families, numbering thirty to forty persons altogether. One ranch had a settlement of seventy-three colonists from New Mexico, composed of mixed Mexicans and Pueblo Indians and one American hunter married to a Mexican woman. The leader of the settlement was a Pueblo Indian, a man of high intelligence and ability. His descendants live today in a near-by town, where they are commonly referred to as being of "old Spanish" origin. Some of them have married Americans, who carefully explain the "old Spanish" connection! The remainder of the Mexican population of Descanso and environs in 1844 consisted of some sixty persons who were house servants, carpenters, blacksmiths, *vaqueros*,¹⁶ and majordomos.

The *rancheros* themselves were creoles, colonial-born sons and grandsons of families from Spain, of prosperous but by no means noble status. One of them, indeed, had been a corporal in a northern *presidio*,¹⁷ and was given his grant in return for yeoman service in quelling an Indian uprising. The colonists were *mestizos*, demonstrably in the process of fusion with American Indian groups at the time of their arrival in Descanso. And it is probably safe to say that the assorted carpenters, blacksmiths, *vaqueros*, and majordomos were also *mestizos*. Out of a hundred and seventy persons, less than a quarter could be considered to be of undiluted Spanish origin, even by the most flattering construing of family histories. The majority were *mestizos* even as their immigrant cousins from Mexico some decades later were.

The romantic tradition could be usefully revised in the light of fact. The story would be more interesting for the re-telling. Instead of gilded artificialities about old Spain, why not the story

¹⁶ *vaquero*: a herdsman or cowboy.

¹⁷ *presidio*: a fort.

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of Rafael Bernal, the Pueblo Indian, and his heroic sons, in their fight for their riverside settlement, or the story of Dominga Valdez, the Amazon of the colonists, who drove trains of supplies through Indian ambushes? They were heroic, they were pioneers; in their time, they were the salt of the earth. They were *mestizos*. There is a cultural and genetic continuity between them and the later comers from Mexico.

But such stories would not make such fine escapist reading as the sentimentalized version. They would connect "old-Spanish culture" with present-day Latin-American culture in the Southwest. It would be impossible to maintain the fiction that the "old Spanish" were so superior, of such a different strain, and of such exalted background that any comparison between them and the immigrant Mexican is out of the question. It would do away with the convenient corollary, popular in Descanso today, that any Mexican-American who is well-groomed, literate, and able must necessarily be from an "old Spanish family," and that the others, being of less exalted genetic origins, cannot be expected to attain literacy and/or cleanliness.

The Pioneers Meet

Two Spanish exploration parties had passed through Descanso Valley in the eighteenth century, but, although the land was fertile and well-watered, it was not selected as a site for mission activities. It was too close to the desert, whose warlike Indian groups had already established a record of violent and bloody opposition to such activities as being Christianized, making adobe bricks, planting grapevines, and herding cows. It was not until the early nineteenth century that a mission outpost, a *capilla*,¹⁸ was established in Descanso Valley and put in charge of soldiers and converted Indians.

The valley and its environs contained six to nine Indian *rancherías*,¹⁹ comprising a total population of fifteen hundred persons. They had no elaborate social organization, such as the Pueblo Indians, nor a warlike tradition, like the Apaches or

¹⁸ *capilla*: a small church or chapel.

¹⁹ *ranchería*: a settlement of related families.

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Navajos. Each *rancheria* was a more or less isolated unit, where a subsistence living was gathered from the natural food supply—roots, rodents, and rabbits, with additions in the form of seeds, nuts, and fowl. There was no agriculture, a condition which the *padres* rectified by setting their converts to putting in a grain crop shortly after the dedication of the *capilla*.

The practical command of husbandry and agriculture which the *padres* exhibited and their ability to teach these skills to simple and none too enthusiastic pupils was as noteworthy as anything in their whole record of achievement. A great deal of the development work had been done in the Southwest before an American settler ever saw it. Irrigation systems had been set up, orchards and fields put under cultivation, roads opened, grazing lands plotted, and, most important, a force of agricultural labor had been trained in arts ranging from plowing to firing tile. Even at Descanso Capilla, which was not large or important in the mission scheme, water had been brought from the mountains to cultivate fields and orchards. Enough grain was regularly raised to supply other missions, as well as Descanso Valley; and, in good years, five thousand head of cattle were slaughtered for their meat and hides. Ranchers plowing land in the vicinity today still turn up an occasional shard of tile from the old kilns.

On a fall day in 1827, the *capilla* had an unexpected visitor, whose presence in that country had some fateful historic implications. Jedediah Smith, the fur trapper, was making his second journey over the trail he had opened the year before, when he had been the first American to enter California through the deserts to the east and over the wall of the Rockies. The Mexican governor had been seriously disturbed by this entry, to the extent of ordering Smith and his party out of the territory. He was more disturbed when the party, after bivouacking for the winter in the mountains, came right back the next year over the old trail. The governor saw in such persistence—and quite correctly—the advance guard of a flood of American immigration over the mountains.

But at the *capilla*, the presence of the Smith party camped near-by was a welcome diversion in the dull routine of a mission outpost. The overseer brought out "such little luxuries as he

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had." Smith meticulously paid for the cattle his men had slaughtered, a nicety which some of his successors were not to observe. One of his party who had been wounded in a brush with desert Indians was given care, and no doubt the details of the ambush were talked over. If there was anything which united American and Mexican in the Southwest, it was that of making common cause against the Indians. At any event, the residents of the mission apparently lacked the prescient imagination of the Mexican governor.

The governor had been right. After the Smith expedition, mountain men, trappers, guides, traders, and Indian fighters fairly tumbled over the wall of the mountains into the fertile valleys below. A trade route from Santa Fe was opened up through the pass, and the main rendezvous for the wagons was near Descanso. There were tremendous profits, as well as tremendous risks, in the business of bringing New Mexican woolens to exchange for the superior California-bred horses and mules.

After the expropriation of mission lands, the Mexican government made another sweeping change, and this time a fatal one, in its colonizing policies. It permitted, even encouraged, foreigners to obtain land grants in the Southwest, providing they swore nominal allegiance to the Mexican government and the Catholic faith. The Americans coming over the mountains found neither hard to do, and they often eased their path of acquisition by marriage into the landholding families. Soon several of the Mexican grantees had American sons-in-law; English and American names began to appear in the petitions for new grants; some properties were sold outright to foreigners. Gradually the population of Descanso Valley began to change. The Americans first equaled the Mexicans, then outnumbered them. More and more land titles bore American names, although, in the cases where inheritance was a factor, the legatee might also have a Spanish proper name, speak English with difficulty, and, in general, be almost as Latin as his Mexican mother. Fusion was taking place, but it was peaceful fusion.

The early Americans were almost entirely males. They came, not to conquer, but to make a place for themselves in the community. They married, not only for land, but for homes. In

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Descanso Valley, for every expedition leader who married into a landholding family, there were lesser lights who married major-domo's daughters, colonist's daughters, or even *vaquero's* daughters. They acquiesced easily enough in observing the forms of the Catholic Church, including the baptism of their children, and the routine of a Latin household. The Mexicans exhibited no missionary zeal for demanding more. Wives, entrenched in the support of family and community connections, could afford to accept a few *extranjero*²⁰ characteristics good-naturedly.

American males could find much in common with their Mexican fathers-in-law and brothers-in-law. Cattle-raising, hunting, and fighting Indians were the vocations of the community; dancing, gambling, and horse racing its avocations. Good mountain men were expert at the vocations; life in Santa Fe had given them more than passable efficiency in the avocations—after all, a fandango was only another version of a hoe-down. If many pioneer Americans could scarcely read and write, neither could their Mexican in-laws. It was not a bookish society. If a man had to have a letter written for him, it was no disgrace. Don Ricardo S—, the patriarch landholder of the Valley, had never learned to write anything but his name, in the course of a long and influential life. If *ranchero* homes were not luxurious—for, despite the romantic tradition, they had a way of running to rawhide cots, dirt floors, and home-made furniture—they compared favorably with the frontier cabins of Missouri.

It was easy to make a living; in fact, in the booming days of the hide and tallow trade, the living practically made itself. Neighboring ranch communities co-operated to a high degree in round-ups and marketing. A man's word was as good as his bond. Only a few Americans of the lowest type would co-operate with the Indians in horse and cattle raids; other Americans pursued them as enthusiastically as they did the Indians or the occasional renegade Mexican. In a fertile land, far from overcrowded, competition was at a minimum. There were no sharp practices—the necessity for them did not exist.

Both Americans and Mexicans took pride in the land they shared. Both were frequently exasperated by the distant, fluctuat-

²⁰ *extranjero*: foreign.

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ing rule of Mexico City, from where, it is said, administrative dispatches arrived only once or twice a year. Many among them cherished the dream of an independent California republic; some took steps to implement the ideal. Others, including influential Mexicans, favored the tentative plans of the American Larkin to arrange the sale of California to the United States. But a few, among both groups, had personal axes of self-aggrandizement to grind. Between the Castros and the Fremonts and others of their ilk, what could have been peaceful fusion ended in a war of annexation. And out of that war grew attitudes and emotions which are alive in Descanso today, nearly a hundred years after the first shot was fired in the Bear Flag Revolt. Even a minor war seems to breed emotions of a horrible vitality which persist, embalmed in a hundred histories and a thousand folk tales, long after the guns and the hands that fired them are gone.

So far as Descanso was concerned, it is probable that its residents, both American and Mexican, had no very clear idea of how the war started or what part they should play in it. Some Americans who were naturalized Mexican citizens showed considerable vacillation. Many Mexicans showed marked reluctance to respond to levies upon their supplies, their horseflesh, and their own time. But feeling—and confusion—finally rose to the pitch of culminating in a skirmish, later dignified under the name of battle, at the ranch house of an American living west of Descanso Valley. The battle was a family affair, between a few neighbors and relatives-in-law. The American who owned the ranch and several of the men with him had close relatives by marriage among the Mexicans who charged the irrigation ditch. The Mexicans captured the ranch by firing its thatch roof, but one of their men was killed in the charge. Bitterness, by that time, was so intense that there was talk of killing all the Americans, or at least the nominal Mexican citizens, as traitors. But a responsible Mexican intervened and the prisoners were marched off to the authorities, to be later released without penalty. It is said of the Mexican who intervened that, although in later years he lost his land and became a drunken tramp, he was never without a friend among the Americans. They were always ready to furnish money for a drink or bail.

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The terms of the peace which ended the Mexican War in California were not unfair or vindictive, on the whole. Less can be said for the recording of history, on both sides of the border. Little Americans are likely to gather the impression that the Mexicans were corrupt, frivolous, cowardly, treacherous, and that the whole business was inevitable, anyway. Little Mexicans can turn to their history books for reinforcement of the stereotype of the domineering, imperialistic, and treacherous *Yanqui*. An eminent historian has recently remarked that, as long as history is written, it will be written subjectively. It is written in a climate of opinion. If that climate of opinion is chauvinistic, or defensively nationalistic, history may be "an instrument for . . . nursing ancient grudges." But the study of history "should,—indeed it must"—he adds—"teach us the interdependence of peoples and of nations, the common origins of many of our national institutions, and the similarity of problems faced by most nations."²¹ With this in mind, we might feel that the time has come, both here and in Mexico, for a rewriting of the events of the 1840's. We might at least see that the enlightened, tolerant versions are given wider circulation.

Particularly among the older residents of Descanso today, there is much of the careless arrogance of the conqueror toward the Mexican. It seems natural to couple the conquered Mexican with the conquered Indian. An elderly law-enforcement officer, son of pioneers, said: "Why, the Mexican is just like the Indian—he used to own this country. I'm not saying we did the best we could toward either, but the whole thing was in the cards. We were a nation that was young, pushing, and able. They couldn't hold what they had. We won, and, anyway, it's all in the past now." "The Spanish took the land away from the Indian, and we took it away from them both," said one Descanso philosopher, "and I guess that's just human nature." "Dog eat dog" was another comment—one which always seems to be more popular with top-than underdogs. "I guess a Mex don't change much," said another student of history. "They like it easy and they're always squabbling among themselves. Look at that bunch on Monticello

²¹ Henry Steele Commager, "Wars Are Won in History Books," *Magazine Digest* (December, 1944), pp. 19-23.

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Avenue and then look at the ones who used to own this country. They wouldn't make an effort and they was always fighting among themselves. So we took over."

Conquerors often encourage the picturesque and exotic to survive among the vanquished, if only to serve as decorations for conquest. Pottery ash trays of drowsing Mexicans vie in popularity in Descanso with commercial Navajo jewelry. There is a noble red man, as well as a high-born don, in many a school and civic pageant. It is fashionable in Descanso—and was even before the recent wave of interest in Latin America—to like "Spanish food" and to know a few bars of "La Golondrina" or "El Rancho Grande." Riding clubs deck themselves in *ranchero* costume and saddlery. And just as the Indian is better accepted if he is the son of a chief, so had the socially acceptable Mexican better be the descendant of a don!

The Mexican-American is anything but insensitive to the defeatist attitudes which are suggested to him by this interpretation of history. A high school boy remarked, with considerable perception, "Mexicans and Indians, they're in a class by themselves. They're better off than Negroes, because they weren't slaves. But they're worse off than foreigners because they were defeated right here in the United States." The Spanish-language paper remarks: "*Y en la jerarquía social economía, estamos . . . un poco mas arriba que los indigenas.*" (In the socio-economic hierarchy, we are a little higher than the aborigines.) A quip about the Holmes Supply (hiring agency for Mexicans and Indians for the Santa Fe Railroad) runs as follows: "First the army licked the Mexicans and Indians. Then they let the Holmes Supply do it all over again."

If one remembers that many of the Mexicans under Mexican rule were sympathetic toward peaceful annexation to the United States and that, immediately after the annexation and ever since, the Mexican-American has been unswerving in his loyalty to this country, the following excerpt from a life story has great significance. The teller is a young Mexican-American staff sergeant. "My father came from Mexico in 1910, but my mother's family was California Mexican from way back. Some of the stuff we got in history used to get under my skin. I didn't think my mother's

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folks were cowards and liars. But I'd forgotten it until just before the war. We didn't have much money and I couldn't get a job, although I was a good electrician. Electrical jobs were scarce and they didn't go to Mexicans. I met this guy floating around the colony. Maybe he was a Sinarquista,²² I don't know. Anyway, he fed me full of how this country really belonged to us, and the Americans had taken it away and treated us like dogs even today, and how young Mexicans shouldn't fight any more imperialistic wars for Uncle Sam. I was sour on everything, anyway, and I fell for some of it. My mother and sisters were crazy. 'Don't talk like a traitor,' mother would say. Well, I got drafted, and the army has treated me swell. I feel like I amount to something now. But I've heard from other fellows in uniform—Mexican-Americans—that guys like that had talked to them, too." Who would say we have not always been miraculously fortunate in the loyalty of our minority groups, considering the breaches for propaganda we have created out of old and new grudges!

The Aftermath

The signing of the peace of Guadalupe Hidalgo opened the way for a flood of American settlers. These settlers were not chiefly males. They came in family groups, with their possessions loaded into ox-carts, with plows, hoes, seeds, and an insatiable land-hunger to match their equipment. They did not come as strangers into a different community, willing to make concessions in order to find a place for themselves. They came into a land which they regarded as theirs by right, backed by a national opinion ready to enforce that right. They had a consciousness of destiny—referred to in that period as "manifest." The older residents and their different ways of life could appear to them only as trivialities, sometimes irritating, sometimes amusing and picturesque, but always as something to be brushed aside in the accomplishment of destiny.

"Brushed aside" probably explains as well as any other phrase

²² *Sinarquista*: a member of the Unión Nacional Sinarquista, an organization originating in Mexico and quite generally agreed to be fascistic in nature. Its activities among Spanish-speaking people in the United States were the subject of official investigation in 1942.

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the position in which the Mexican groups found themselves. There was nothing consciously cruel or deliberately iron-fisted about the methods of the American settlers. They bought land outright, for generally fair prices, from many of the Mexican landholders, who, wearied and confused, were glad enough to retire to the cities to form a species of aristocratic émigré colony. When purchase was not possible, litigation and money-lending served to obtain the land. That both the legal interpretation of land-grant titles and the complexities of compound interest were far removed from the spirit and intent of old California custom—to the tremendous disadvantage of the old Californians—did not concern the newcomers. Everything was done legally, American style.

The Mexicans were already a numerical minority in the state at the time it was annexed. Their fraction of representation became smaller with the passing of each year, enormously so with the passing of each decade. The searching of public records, rosters of officials, and newspaper notices in Descanso from 1850 to 1860 for Spanish names is a weary task, with disappointingly slight results. The job is even less rewarding as one progresses toward the turn of the century. Persons with Mexican names were born, got married, and died—that much is evident. One or two held minor offices, such as that of constable in their own communities. Occasionally a newspaper filled space with an item such as, "An old Mexican with a dancing bear attracted quite a crowd on the corner of Western and Commercial" or "J. Trujillo, laborer, was injured in a fall from a hay wagon on the Adams Ranch" or "Police arrested Sanchez and Garcia, two Mexicans, for drunkenness." One can agree with the testimony of Descanso's old-timers that "the Mexicans were always here." But where were they and what was happening to them?

The reconstruction of what happened to them cannot be made from records and printed material; these are too few and too slight. But out of conversations with the old people, the sons and grandsons of early Californians, by listening to family histories and reminiscences, a story can be pieced together. The descendants of California Mexicans form a small minority of Descanso's present-day Mexican population, but many of them have re-

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mained close to the places which their ancestors worked and tilled. Rambling and unreliable as the recollections of old folk often are, still, out of many stories, a picture begins to emerge.

The landed gentry, who were comparatively few in number, drifted away toward the larger cities, but, when property changed hands, there were still jobs for the lesser people. Majordomos became foremen on American ranches; *vaqueros* became cowboys. A few were able to purchase small tracts of land in near-by valleys; in rare cases, their great-grandchildren occupy them today, struggling with dry-farmed grain crops and small vineyards. The colonists from New Mexico, numerically the largest group in the Mexican community, remained where they had finally settled, on the banks of the Socorro River about four miles southwest of Descanso. This colony grew. At the time of the Civil War, it was estimated to contain some six hundred persons. It must have looked much like the little towns of the Rio Grande Valley in New Mexico—a cluster of adobe houses, set amid small orchards and carefully tilled fields, with a hillside chapel at its center. The life, too, must have resembled that of the New Mexican village. It was a subsistence farming community, self-sufficient to a considerable extent. While land was held individually, its use, as well as the regulation of village affairs, involved a high degree of co-operation. There was much intermarriage, close family and village ties, and a great amount of mutual aid. The Socorro settlement was a tiny backwater, swirling in its own patterns, while the main stream of American expansion and development swept on past it.

How long the Socorro settlement would have survived as the American scene around it became more complicated and industrialized, is difficult to say. The New Mexican settlers never had a clear title to their land, and endless litigation marked their efforts to hold it. In any event, an act of nature settled the question ruthlessly. In 1862, the entire settlement was wiped out by a flood of the Socorro River. No lives were lost, but fields, homes, livestock, and intimate possessions were swept away. A few persons reclaimed their lands, but most of them drifted to settle on the outskirts of growing cities. The town of Socorro, near Descanso, developed a settlement long known as Spanishtown on

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its southern borders. The first Mexican dwellings in Descanso's *barrio pequeño*,²³ in the Spring Valley district, came into existence shortly afterward, as did a small rural settlement ten miles east of Descanso. The "old Spanish" became ranch workers, laborers in the railroad shops, on the streets, in the vineyards, and in the cement plant. They remain so today, except for those who gained a temporary place in war industry.

The traditional ways of life had been reinforced in the tight little village of the Socorro settlement, perhaps enforced by social isolation as much as anything. The isolation continued to a great extent after the dispersal. Huddled in groups on the outskirts of American cities and American life, the descendants of the colonists continued to speak Spanish, eat *tortillas* and *gorditas*, and conduct the crisis rites of birth, marriage, and death in the old fashion. These tendencies were no doubt enforced by the addition of a small number of immigrants from Mexico every year. This immigration was small—during one decade only sixty-nine persons were added to the Mexican-foreign born of Descanso county—but it was steady. The immigrant fell heir to the isolation from the main stream of American life which distinguished the California Mexican. Together, they clung to old ways. It is very difficult, in the *barrio pequeño* today, to distinguish the living patterns of descendants of colonial Mexicans from those of immigrants arrived rather recently from Mexico. Only in details—and small details—of spoken Spanish, in the preparation of food, or in the celebration of festivities, is there a difference. The broad outlines of culture are the same for both groups.

However, had there been no *mass* immigration from Mexico in the twentieth century, there are many reasons for believing that these little side-eddies of Latin life would have been gradually swept into the main stream of American life. While there was a great deal of busy indifference and some careless arrogance in the attitudes of Anglo-Americans toward them, there was no active animosity. The Mexican-Americans were too few in num-

²³ *barrio pequeño*: *Barrio*, which has no exact English equivalent, means, in Mexico, a social division of a small town or city. It does not correspond to the political divisions, but implies a grouping of families who have ties of social organization, often in the celebration of *fiestas* and in performing communal work for the *barrio*. *Pequeño* means little.

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ber, too few to be conspicuous, and—more important—too few to constitute an economic resource in the form of a large pool of cheap labor.

More quiet fusion than Descanso ever suspected was taking place. This fusion, unlike that of *ranchero* days, took the Latin woman away from her community, away from supporting family custom. There is scarcely an old Mexican family in the district who cannot tell of an aunt, a great-aunt, or female cousins of varying degrees who married an *Americano*. And, if one begins from the other end, there are a surprising number of prominent Descanso families who have a grandmother, a mother, or aunts and great-aunts of "old Spanish"—read Mexican-American—origin. It is possible to trace "Spanish" female relatives in several cases back to the "old part of town" and to family groups bearing the names of the original New Mexican colonists. It is perfectly possible that a number of Pueblo Indian genes are lurking in the genetic equipment of a few of Descanso's good "American" families!

Whatever the outcome of this slow mingling of strains might have been—and it seems likely that it might have resulted in the gradual disappearance of the Mexican-American groups as recognizable entities—the fusion was brought to an abrupt stop by a large influx of Mexican nationals in the decades 1910 to 1930. The land pattern established by the *padres*, with its constant need for a supply of cheap, tractable labor, was bringing the *mestizo* again to Descanso. But he was not coming as a skilled workman, a trusted foreman, or a small landholder. He was to occupy, in Descanso's economy, a position analogous to that of the Indian in the mission economy. And he was to have two labels attached to him immediately, the class label of "immigrant" and the caste label of "inferior race." Descanso had been learning lessons, some of them representing a very poor type of instruction, both from its own experience and from that of the rest of the United States.

1910-1930

CHAPTER II

IMMIGRANTS

A Minority

THE OX-CARTS which came sliding down the pass into Descanso in 1851 were called immigrant trains, but the people driving them were immigrants merely from another part of the United States. They were Caucasians of predominantly North European ancestry. Most of them had been born in little Ohio, Illinois, or New England towns. They had been brought up in English-speaking traditions, in the main currents of American life of the early nineteenth century. They were small farmers, petty tradespeople, or semi-skilled artisans. In every way except one they conformed to the ideal of "good pioneer stock."

The point of difference lay in the fact that they had not come directly from their New England and Middle West birthplaces. They had been living for several years in the new capital of a strange religion, in Salt Lake City, Utah. They were Mormons. Under the leadership of Brigham Young, they had cut themselves loose from old ties and become part of a close, homogeneous group, very conscious of their difference from the rest of the United States. Sometimes they could doubt whether they were still Americans at all, so frequent were their clashes with the gentiles and those of their leader with the Government of the United States. Among their dreams was that of establishing a great western homeland for people of their faith, possibly a politically independent nation, but certainly a far-flung economic empire. Under the impetus of that hope, small colonizing expeditions went down here and there into the Southwest.

For industry, practical planning, and organized co-operative effort, the Mormon settlers have been greatly praised. Indeed, for these qualities they can scarcely be overpraised. They left the

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stamp of hard work and practical foresight wherever they went. The counter charges of narrowness, clannishness, and group greed may be just as well founded; the history and situation of the Mormons would have made them nigh-well inevitable. The Mormon movement was not made up of highly educated, widely experienced, or even widely traveled people. They were poor, provincial, hard-working folk who saw, in a twist of interpretation of the Old Testament, a chance for both heavenly salvation and earthly ease. Persecutions made them more intense, drew them closer together.

The Mormons in Descanso went to work with a will and in a few years practically made over a section of Descanso Valley. They bought a tract from one of the Mexican grant holders, and, at the end of six years, had a flourishing settlement with good houses, stout corrals, and adequate defense against Indian raids. The orchards, grazing lands, and irrigated field of the old *rancho* were made to blossom and thrive. Had the Mormons remained and augmented their numbers, they probably would have impressed upon Descanso a tradition of earnest morality and sober, if narrow, idealism, quite different from its boisterous, booming history.

But the Mormons were not the only settlers. The years following the close of the Mexican War saw a veritable stampede into California of determined land-seekers. Many of them came, like the Okies and Arkies of a later date, from the middle South, or the frontier settlements of Missouri and Nebraska. Many were in not much better financial condition upon their arrival than the Dust Bowl refugees. Early pioneer biographies abound in accounts of "Mr. G—, who arrived with just seventy-five cents in his pockets" or "Mr. A— who, lacking the money to purchase a wagon, packed his belongings overland on the backs of two jacks." "He arrived almost destitute of means" is a commonplace line in *The Pioneer Register*. These arrivals went to work as freighters, looked for gold in the hills, or even worked in the grain harvests on the big ranches—but they had their eye on land. Eventually they got it, and, true to the land pattern of the state, they got it in big tracts.

There was constant friction between Mormon and gentile in

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Descanso for the six years of Mormon settlement. The gentiles complained that the Mormons tried to freeze them out of county offices, that they were using their co-operative strength to grab all the good land and water rights, and that they constituted a tight, autocratic little corporation. The Mormons complained that the gentiles were Godless, lawless and shiftless. The whole matter was abruptly settled, in 1857, by the issuance of a recall order to Salt Lake, where Brigham Young was anticipating difficulty with United States troops.

Mormon properties were sold practically overnight and at tremendous sacrifices. Houses and stock were abandoned, and a group of the faithful set out over the pass in the winter snows, to arrive at Salt Lake some months later, after suffering tremendous hardships, almost destitute. The few Mormons who remained broke with the authority of their church; some of them had already cast their lot in with the gentiles. A jaundiced observer of Descanso after the recall said that it looked like a ghost town, full of abandoned properties and "apostates, scalawags, and horse thieves." It is certain that, with the departure of the Mormons, a great deal of purpose, orderliness, and organization also disappeared. Although some Mormons returned later, they, too, were apostates by the very act of return; they were without the backing of a great central organization. It was not until 1921 that a Mormon Church other than those of Josephite sects was again established in Descanso. The Mormons never retrieved their old domination.

Class—

Throughout succeeding years, Descanso had slight experience with immigration. While eastern cities were receiving the impact of successive waves of Irish, Germans, Scandinavians, Poles, Slavs, and Italians, Descanso was getting its population increase from migrant Americans. Most of these Americans were from the same localities and same stratum of society which had provided Descanso with its earlier arrivals—the "old stock" descendant, from the Middle West or middle South, of lower middle-class origin. Among them were an increasing number of *descendants* of European immigrants. Descanso's actual foreign-born European groups

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were always small—the largest, the Germans, numbered less than three hundred—but its second and third generation groups were large.

However, even these groups represented origins predominantly North European. Irish, German, Danish, and Swedish, together with Canadians and English, made up the bulk of the foreign-born, as their descendants made up the bulk of the second-generation. Poles and Slavs seemed to have by-passed Descanso almost entirely. Descanso's few Jewish families were of German extraction; they established themselves in the town's retail business in early days and were scarcely ever thought of as different from the city's other substantial citizens. Descanso has plenty of run-of-the-mill anti-Semitism in its thinking, but seldom directs it toward these families. Descanso thought it had more Italians than it actually did; they were more visible, perhaps. Actually, the Italians always constituted a small foreign-born group in the city—no more than 128 at any time—and the number of second-generation Italians was correspondingly small. And, like the Irish, who were "lace-curtain" by the time they got to Descanso, the Italians were at least "checked-curtain." They had money in their pockets, a fair command of English, and were on the way up.

Descanso had never seen the immigrant in his original state—the Irish you took off the boat and put shoes on, the Italian you herded into a box-car headed for Chicago, or the Pole in his village costume, his possessions bundled in a kerchief. But that does not mean Descanso had not heard about him. Descanso was a literate city around the turn of the century, in touch with the best and worst thought of the country at large. It had a public library, a progressive newspaper, study clubs of various descriptions, an opera house, visiting lecturers, and all the appurtenances for development and dissemination of public opinion. Along with such local preoccupations as lowered freight rates and cleaning up the saloons, it had heard about "the problem of our foreign-born." It was familiar with all the connotations in the words "immigrant" and "foreigner," and it had even heard of slums, although it didn't think it had any itself.

It knew, for instance, what the old-stock American meant when he said he had come west to "get shet of the foreigners that are

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overrunning the country." It understood why the second and third generation citizen took considerable pains to hide his foreign origins, or to dress them up as much as possible. It knew that, no matter how successful you were, a cold-water flat on New York's East Side could never be pointed to with pride—although a slab cabin in Missouri could. It appreciated the fact that the only successful immigrant was one who could no longer be recognized as such.

"Immigrant" evoked a whole series of pictures, none of them very complimentary. Most of all it evoked a stereotype. Like the printer's plate from which it takes its name, a stereotype in thought is highly rigid and inflexible. Any number of copies can be printed, but the details, once cast, can never be changed. The mental picture, highly colored or wholly erroneous, can be stamped uncritically on all succeeding situations. The stereotype of the immigrant runs somewhat as follows: he is of low intelligence, "dumb," lives like an animal, has brute strength, little "higher nature," drinks too much, produces too many children, is either improvident and reckless with money or grasping and scheming, is given to criminal behavior, and is incapable of becoming a "real American." The Yankees said it about the Irish, the Irish about the Swedes, the Swedes about the Poles, the Poles about the Italians, and so on. It has been applied in turn to every immigrant group which entered the country, among them the progenitors of our most useful and brilliant citizens. It was, by 1900, part of Descanso's mental luggage, ready to be used on the first recognizable immigrant group.

Descanso knew that to speak broken English, to eat queer, smelly food, and to display recognizable signs of belonging to another culture were all marks of low status, if done by an immigrant. Of course, a foreign accent *could* be fascinating, particularly to women, if its owner was a visiting celebrity. And that smelly food, dressed up a little, could command five dollars a plate. And old-world culture, if studied in the pages of the *National Geographic Magazine* or in the colored slides of "travel talks," could be quaint and exotic—it was comfortably removed in space. Descanso, even in its comparative isolation, was well able to make the distinction between the exotic traits which car-

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ried prestige, like the accent of a foreign ambassador, and those which carried low status, like the broken English of Mrs. Berinski of the Variety Store. One was removed from the concerns of daily life, the other was part of the struggle for place.

Descanso had established its own rules for determining status, and they were not dissimilar from the rules prevailing in the United States at large. Those who had arrived earliest in Descanso had superior status, particularly if they had reinforced early arrival by the acquisition of property. The best stock was preferably "old American," the next best North European, the least best that of later immigrant groups. Indians and Mexicans didn't count, because they had been conquered and because they were dark-skinned. So it is in the national group. If your ancestor was an indentured servant in Colonial America in 1750, you can point to him with pride and even join an organization which makes a ritual of that pride. If, however, he was a skilled artisan named Cherninsky who came through Ellis Island in 1890, you are forced to feel somewhat defensive. If he was Indian, your opportunities for defensiveness are considerably increased. If he was Negro, you have a weighty bar to competition.¹

However, Descanso, like the United States, had prided itself on being a fluid society, one where the man who arrived with seventy-five cents in his pocket could end with a fortune, if he worked hard and watched his chances.² The theory even applied in a vague sort of way to Negroes, Orientals, and other "non-white" groups, although they were expected to be very modest in their aspirations. Groups on the way up, however, even from the humblest beginnings, soon become competitors. The whole status structure starts to creak with the strain of so much upward mobility. The orderliness of society looks threatened. People begin to see "new people rushing in from everywhere" or "foreigners overrunning the country" or "the Jews grabbing all the business." An obstinate panic, like that of Descanso's when it hears the superiority of the North European questioned, seizes them.

¹ Louis Adamic, "Aliens and Alien Factors," *Harper's*, CLXXIII (November, 1936), 1-16. Adamic, *From Many Lands*, Harper, 1940, pp. 293-302.

² Gunnar Myrdal points out that Americans dislike to admit that class, or social stratifications, exist; that most Americans believe they are "middle class." Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, Harper, 1944, I, 670-671.

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Status-reinforcing organizations, like Descanso's Native Sons, arise. They begin to suggest that perhaps it would have been better if "all these people" had never come here in the first place.

Other literatures may invent a White Queen shouting "Off with their heads!" Our own version of *Alice in Wonderland* contains a corpulent congressional figure yelling, "Send 'em back to where they came from!" There have been few national groups in this country toward whom the sentiment has not been expressed, at some time or other, that, after completing the essential and dirty work for us, they would "go home." The Irish were supposed, in the fifties, to be hungering for the old sod. The Germans clung to their language and culture because, of course, they were planning a return to the homeland—during the first World War, there was considerable sentiment in favor of packing them off en masse. The early literature about the Italian is full of the pious hope that he would return to spend a happy old age in Naples, after completing a little light ditchdigging here. And so on, down to California's recent essay at relieving itself permanently of thousands of citizens of Japanese ancestry, under the guise of military necessity. But American tradition of the rights of the individual has been too strong to permit any mass repatriation talk to go beyond the limits of talk. We have always retrieved ourselves in time, and, after blowing off emotional steam in this fashion, settled down to the job of making rational adjustments.

Descanso knew all these patterns, all these attitudes and emotions, that had grown up around minority groups of our citizens, but it knew them secondhand until 1910. Then it began to acquire an immigrant minority group of its own to practice on. It already had the theory. The Mexicans were to provide the laboratory experience.

By 1910, Descanso had recovered from both the boom of the eighties and the deflation of the nineties. It was an important stop for two transcontinental railroads and a repair and maintenance point for one of them. The Santa Fe was double-tracking its line from Albuquerque west. Orchards and irrigated lands were coming into production. There was a pressing need for labor—not skilled labor, for earlier arrivals were able to provide

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that, but for ditchdiggers, track workers, and fruit pickers who would be tractable, easily moved, and willing to work for low wages. The Southwest suddenly awoke to the fact that there was such a supply close at hand, in fact, just over its southern borders. Descanso moved to get its share, and, its first bona fide immigrants began to arrive.

In the decade from 1890 to 1900, the foreign-born Mexican population of the entire county in which Descanso is located had an addition of exactly 69 persons; but, by 1910, Descanso city alone had 888 foreign-born from Mexico; by 1920, it had 1,989; and by 1930, it had 2,244. An old resident described how the newcomers looked to him: "I was working near the depot on a grading job and I used to see them getting off the cars. I'd seen Mexicans all my life but these sure looked different. Half of 'em had blankets on and sandals on their feet. Some of 'em wore funny big hats and some wore funny little ones. There was women with their arms full of babies and bundles. They'd mill around and jabber, all excited, for a while, and then they'd stand still and look scared. And, golly, were there a lot of them! I said to my partner, 'Looks like Mexico's moved in!'" This was the sort of scene, with some differences of detail, which eastern cities had witnessed for years, and to which they had become more or less seasoned. Descanso was not seasoned, but neither was it unprepared. It had its attitudes, its theories of immigrant status and behavior, ready.

Descanso was immediately convinced, and still is, that no immigrant group had ever been so "low" or so "dumb." The stereotype emerged in all its splendor and has continued to flourish. The newcomers were of uniformly low intelligence, it was said. (Poorly used testing devices, applied to bi-lingual school children, were later to give this estimate a great air of "scientific" validity, but it doubtless would have been made anyway.) They lived like animals, produced too many children, wasted their earnings on drink, and never took thought of the morrow.

Once, for a few days, I entertained myself reading, to various substantial businessmen, the following statement:

It cannot be said that he ordinarily is of a provident disposition; he lives in the present and worries comparatively little about the future.

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He is not extravagant in any particular way, but is wasteful in every way; it is his nature to drift where he ought to plan and economize. This disposition, combined with an ever-present tendency to drink too much, is liable to result in insecure employment and small income. And, to make matters worse, in families of this kind, children are born with reckless regularity.

"The Mexican!" agreed my listeners enthusiastically, except for two more cautious individuals who thought it might apply to the Italians. It was great fun to tell the victims, who had been selected for their Celtic surnames, that the statement had been made about the Irish in Boston. To do them all credit, they appreciated the implications behind the joke. One old gentleman leaned across his desk and said, "You've hit something! I tell you, they treated us worse than niggers. I can remember my father, walking the streets of Boston, with the signs out everywhere. 'No Irish need apply.'"

For many years, Descanso cherished the illusion that its new Mexican population was not going to be very permanent. Some day, when the work was all done, they would "go home." They were considered so many colorful gypsies, complete with *tortilla* and blanket, who would obligingly take themselves south over the border when the railroad ties were laid and the fruit crops picked. It was held, in the face of all census and housing evidence, that most of them did return to Mexico for part of the year, returning when the seasonal labor cycle again demanded them. They could even be sent home when work was scarce and expenditure of public money for their aid imminent—although it began to be uncomfortably obvious that you couldn't send a bunch of little second-generation American citizens "home." Descanso has only to look around, today, to be convinced that its Mexican-American population is a permanent fixture, but nostalgic echoes can still be heard of the idea that "they would be better off in their own country."

"If we hadn't educated them, they'd be satisfied to go back to their own country," was the opinion of an elderly gentleman in the face of evidence of third-generation Mexican-Americans in Descanso's public schools. "Don't you think," said an earnest clubwoman, "that these young people would get better jobs in

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their own country, where they have the advantage of knowing two languages. You know—like the guides in Mexico City.” “If they’d just be satisfied to go quietly back across the border, I’m sure they could teach their own people a lot,” said one enthusiastic dabbler in inter-cultural harmony. Descanso knows very well that practically no Mexican-American is ever going to remove permanently to Mexico, but it hates to get down to a realistic consideration of how to get along with him in Descanso.

An appreciation of certain Latin-American culture traits is not lacking in Descanso. Upon the romanticizing over “old Spanish days” there has been built a fashionable interest in “our neighbors south of the border.” Mexico is the popular vacation spot for all residents of Descanso who can afford it. They come back utterly charmed, as a rule, laden with craft work of varying artistic worth, and intent upon a return visit as soon as possible. Miles of colored motion picture film of Cuernavaca, Taxco, Xochimilco, and the market at Toluca have been shown in homes, churches, and schools. There is scarcely a women’s organization in the city which has not, at some time during the past two years, “studied” Latin America and debated the beauties of establishing hemispheric friendship. A Mexican patio is as popular a household decoration as a Turkish corner used to be for our Victorian grandparents. But something happens to this appreciation when a group of dark-faced schoolgirls chatter in Spanish at Descanso’s Five and Ten, when a Mexican family buys a house in the north of town, or when there is talk of a youth center which both Mexican-American and Anglo-American children would attend. These things are not remote and charming; they are close to home, touching Anglo-American status at every point. Isn’t it true, the harassed culture-seeker is likely to inquire, that the Mexican immigrant is “much lower” than other Latin Americans—much lower than the population of Mexico today, much lower than those colorful groups she has been studying? Something has to justify the instant switch from friendly appreciation to antagonism.

The American who decorated his home with reproductions of Renaissance art and lithographs of the cathedral at Milan, who hummed snatches of Verdi and considered *zambione* a delicacy,

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was probably convinced that the Italian immigrant was "much lower" than all other Italians. A fad for hand-blown glass and peasant embroidery did little to enhance the status of the Czech steelworker, and a Scandinavian was still a dumb Swenska in Minneapolis in spite of public adulation given to Jenny Lind and Ole Bull. Public opinion in the United States has always been able to draw a perfectly clear-cut line between "old-world culture" and "the foreigner," meaning the immigrant. One was desirable, the other aroused annoyance and antagonism.³ Small wonder, then, that an appreciation of Mexican art is not necessarily followed by an appreciation of the Mexican-American ten blocks away, a fact which some agencies seeking to develop "inter-cultural harmony" would do well to bear in mind. The status of the immigrant is not improved by dressing up his background—the public mind has trained itself for too many years to short-circuit on that connection—but it can be, and has been, improved by every effort which provided for performance and achievement by the immigrant in the American scene. Like Descanso, Americans like a "doer"; they are impressed by accomplishment, not in the past, but right in the present.

It would be slighting a goodly number of Americans to say none of them realized the necessity for opening up channels for immigrant achievement, for Americanizing him in the largest sense, that of action and responsibility in national life. It is true that the attitude represented by the stereotype, of seeing the immigrant as a pawn for heightening one's own status, by and large prevailed and expressed itself in a great deal of unthinking, callous action. But there were always Americans, few in number, perhaps, and not possessed of great influence in the nation at large, who perceived that the solution for the immigrant—as well as for the country to which he had come—lay in providing him outlets for accomplishment. They sensed that to do otherwise, to let prejudice and self-interest dominate completely, would result in the splitting of national unity into a hundred hyphenated islands, all mutually suspicious, all clannish, all with grudges to vent and axes to grind.

Descanso reflected public sentiment in the United States faith-

³ See Margaret Mead, *And Keep Your Powder Dry, Morrow*, 1942, pp. 70-79.

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fully enough to have its quota of persons of this persuasion. They were few, and they did not represent the dominant groups or the mass thinking of the city. But one could find them, among church people, social workers, teachers, with an occasional employer, or among plain working-people in whom a sense of kindness and decency ran strong. Some of them acted unwisely—they were sentimental, or patronizing, or simply ill-informed. Some of them, under social pressure, grew timid in critical situations. But many were resolute and persistent. What they could do was little—it probably came chiefly under the head of encouragement to individual Mexicans—but through action and speech they formed a tiny core of counter-opinion. For many a Mexican-American, this group has provided signposts along the path to adjustment and accomplishment. For Descanso, it has acted as a public conscience, not often listened to, but not forgotten, either.

—and Caste

One cannot discuss the Mexican as an immigrant, comparing his situation and his progress to that of the European immigrant, for very long in Descanso without hearing dissent. "But you know all that isn't exactly true of the Mexican. He's, well—he's *different*." In what way different? Descanso seeks for a euphemism. "Well, he's dark-skinned." But, it can be pointed out, so are many of the Italians. "That's different. They're Europeans. The Mexicans are another race."

So *race*, the bad word of the twentieth century, the word with all the uneasy connotations, the emotion-laden thought, is added to the ideas which cluster around Descanso's Latin Americans. Once the word has been introduced, the conversation takes on both confusion and heat. Plainly enough, one feels, the discussion should have been allowed to die decently before the term ever emerged; but, at the same time, the subject is pursued with a heated fascination somewhat reminiscent of that attached to sex. "You don't get anywhere talking about these things. It just stirs up trouble." "We haven't any racial discrimination against Mexicans in this town. We've got a Mexican member in Kiwanis and

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another in the Elks." "But would you want your daughter to marry a Mexican?" "I never heard all this stuff about discrimination and races until just lately. A Mex was just a Mex in the old days." "Do you mean we should take them in, just like anybody else?" "All the same, I don't want them moving up in our part of town." "The less you say about race, the sooner these things will work themselves out in time." "It's all due to racial feeling, and you can't change that."

What does Descanso mean when it talks about "race"? Frankly, it is not too sure, not half so sure as it was a quarter of a century ago. Then, in the simplicities held over from nineteenth century imperialism, Descanso was serenely confident of what it meant by race. The Lord in his wisdom had created peoples of different skin shades, black, brown, red, yellow, combinations of these—and white. Those with white skins, by their marvelous achievement, had obviously been made to rule the others, with justice and kindness as much as possible, but with swift force if they "got out of hand." These lesser breeds were childish, incapable of knowing what was good for them, likely to revert to savagery without the firm tutelage of the white man. By the same token, they were inherently incapable of rising to his heights. Indians, Orientals, and Negroes—these indubitably came under the wardship of the ruling white. About its small numbers of older Mexicans, Descanso had not quite made up its mind. True, they had been conquered, like the Indian, and they often had a distinguishable amount of pigmentation; but, on the other hand, many of them could claim to be "old Spanish." Generally, Descanso made the classification, "Mexican, Negro, and white"; but it did not apply the full force of racial thinking to the Mexican, except in moments of exasperation.

To the anthropologist, race means simply a collection of inheritable physical characteristics, such as details of eye shape, hair form, or skin color.⁴ Descanso is quite sure that there must be more to race than this; that personalities, ways of speech, ways of living, aspirations, abilities, and potentialities are somehow tied to this matter of the color of one's skin—fixed, as Descanso

⁴ Ruth Benedict, *Race: Science and Politics*, Modern Age, 1940, pp. 31-58.

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likes to say, "in the blood."⁵ To Descanso, the term race is involved with a series of complicated social adjustments, economic necessities, determinations of status, and fear of its loss. Descanso is soothed by hearing the old ideas, the echoes of the nineteenth century, repeated; they reinforce the orderliness of things, with people arranged into permanent grades. It is deeply upsetting to have these ideas questioned, to have not only the sanction of a Creator, but the sanction of science, removed from one's rule-of-thumb arrangements of social patterns. That is why Descanso feels that it is better not to talk about such things—they stir up trouble, trouble where it hurts, in one's own mind.

Descanso is further upset when the word caste is applied to any of its practices toward non-Caucasian groups.⁶ Caste is something that they have in India, something heathenish and cruel. To Descanso, it implies an element of deliberate planning, of conscious controls; these are "foreign" and repugnant. Descanso never did any long-range planning in its entire civic existence. It just grew—and flourished lustily in spite of its planlessness; it is proud of the fact. Its social groupings seem as natural and inevitable to it as its grid streets that encourage flood waters, its blocks of blighted housing, its old red light district—or its bustle and prosperity. To tell Descanso that it has created caste, or semi-caste, situations for some of its citizens—permanent lower groupings in which they are supposed to stay and against which barriers have been erected to prevent their rise—is to insult its picture of itself as a generous, friendly town, where one man's ability is as good as another's, and no one is deliberately "mean."

The community's experience with those of other races was, for a long time, as slight as its experience with those of other nations.

⁵ Most of the citizens in Descanso, like most of the citizens in the United States, think that the blood stream is involved in inheritance. The word gene is either unfamiliar completely to them or is thought of as being concerned with procreation, but not with inheritance.

⁶ The term "caste" is used advisedly. As Myrdal points out, "the recently introduced terms 'minority group' and 'minority status' are also impractical . . . because they fail to make a distinction between the *temporary* social disabilities of recent white immigrants and the *permanent* disabilities of Negroes and other colored people." Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, Harper, 1944, I, 667. The writer's own term "semi-caste" reflects an appreciation of the fact that permanent group disabilities for Mexican-Americans are less severe and easier to escape than those for Negroes and Orientals.

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There was the Indian, of course, living in reservations outside Descanso or drifting along its poorer streets. He was demonstrably inferior, said Descanso. He had been conquered and, instead of rising to the heights of the white man's civilization, he got drunk, stole, was lazy, and wasted his money. Then there were a few Negroes. The Mormon settlers had among their number several Southerners, converted to Mormonism, who brought their slaves with them to Descanso. There was Uncle Gabe, the bugler for the settlement, Gabe's wife Cindy, and about fifteen or sixteen others. They found themselves technically free when California was admitted as a non-slave state; when their masters returned to Utah at the time of the recall, the Negroes preferred to remain behind and establish themselves in the new community. They apparently did, to the extent that one of Descanso's chronicles refers to them as "honored and respected residents."

The same chronicle, in another section entitled "Reminiscences," records an interesting bit of jurisprudence occurring in Descanso shortly before the turn of the century. Several Negro families were having a gathering, when some white men forced their way in. They refused to leave and resisted being ejected, with the result that the Negro's house was practically wrecked. He sued in court for property damages. The following dramatic scene ensued:

M— and his chums appeared on the day set for trial and asked to plead his own case—he very politely requested the court to let him read the complaint—the court very readily complied with the request and handed him the paper. The defendant took the complaint and handed it to the prosecuting witness and holding a cocked pistol to his head, ordered him in most emphatic language to "eat that complaint." The poor fellow turned as pale as nature would allow him to do, and while his pearly teeth chattered, ground the complaint at the rate of a running quartz mill. An additional demand was made of the prosecuting witness: "You swallow the mutilated complaint." The defendant still held his weapon in a bee-line with the African's face, and it is needless to say that his royal decree was strictly carried out.

The court graced the official chair with sealed lips, ashen pale face and bristled hair, but dared not interrupt the proceedings. He watched his first opportunity to adjourn court—sine die—lest he should have to swallow the record of his own court.

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Needless to add, the defendant was not cited in contempt of court.

Descanso's Negro population remained small, confined chiefly to the *barrio pequeño*, or Green Valley district, in the south of town, although there are a few Negro dwellings, increasing in number, west of the railroad tracks, infringing on the main Mexican colony. The 1940 census showed only 660 Negroes in Descanso, out of a population of 43,646 persons. There was some addition to the Negro population after the establishment of war industries in the area, just how much no one knows, but apparently a small fraction of Descanso's population increase of 12,000 persons. However, Descanso "saw black" for a few months in the spring of 1944. A large number of Negro soldiers were quartered at a near-by army post, and facilities for their recreation were few in Descanso, where the bulk of cafés, bars, and dance floors were barred to them. Three allegations of rape of white women threw the city into a state of feverish tension, in which predictions of a race riot by early summer were freely made. True to form, Descanso refused to take any preventive measures, such as the establishment of an inter-racial commission and the immediate providing of recreational outlets for Negro servicemen. Public admission that a problem existed just "stirred up trouble," it was felt. For once, Descanso's ostrich policy was justified, by the simple fact that the Negro troops were moved in the late spring. Tensions relaxed. There had been no solution, but neither had there been any crisis.

Descanso's Negroes are subject to about the same restrictions as they would find in a northern city. There is no Jim-Crowism, no restrictions on use of the ballot, no segregated schooling except that which results from segregated housing. Housing segregation is severe; Negroes are confined to the areas indicated, and the bravest of them would never consider the attempt to buy or rent a house in the north of town. Employment outlets are also sharply restricted. Descanso's Negroes earn their livings chiefly in the lower service trades—as porters, elevator operators, domestics, or dishwashers—or as manual laborers, although the establishment of the Fair Employment Practice Committee gave them recent opportunity in war industry. Despite their small numbers

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and their low economic status, Descanso's Negroes seem to be alert for opportunities to improve their position. Some good leadership exists in the persons of a few Negro clergymen and one physician; the group has affiliations with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Descanso is, on the whole, untroubled by these minority aspirations; it knows that the Negro group is too small and too poor to make much of an impression on the status quo, by itself.

Descanso County had, around 1890, a Chinese population of nearly 700, a relic of the frantically competitive railroad-building of the past century. But the number in Descanso city was only 193, by 1930; it continued to drop until the 1940 census reported only 78 Chinese in the city. These families live, for the most part, concentrated in a small area east of Descanso's business section. Their economic position is not low; many of them operate small businesses, such as butcher shops, cafés, herb-and-tea shops. As the animosity against the Chinese receded generally in California, and particularly since Japan's invasion of China, the Chinese in Descanso found themselves regarded with a detached kindness. No longer were they suspected of mysterious Oriental vices and lurking plots, but were, rather, regarded for what they really are—prosaic, respectable, small tradespeople. That does not imply, however, that they were encouraged to commingle with the community; their isolation, clannishness, and self-sufficiency are regarded as their assets. In view of the fact that the Chinese group is today over-age, and that young Chinese-Americans leave the locality for better opportunities in larger cities, it is possible that a few decades more will see the disappearance of this group.

If Descanso was inclined to see double or triple on its Italian population, it mentally multiplied its Japanese population by thirties, twenties, and fifties, depending on its mood. Its newspaper refers to the "hundreds of Japanese who lived in Descanso before the evacuation"—the census of 1940 reported exactly 79. This figure was augmented slightly in the months immediately preceding the evacuation, during which Japanese were encouraged to leave coast areas voluntarily, but the increase by no means reached hundreds. Twenty or thirty would have been the maximum. The Japanese did not live in a concentrated area, like

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the Chinese, but were distributed throughout the poorer sections of the city. Economically, their situation was superior to that of other minority groups. They owned produce businesses, dry-cleaning establishments, grocery stores; the few who worked as gardeners were experts who commanded high hourly wages and regular employment. No Japanese names appeared on relief rolls, none on police blotters. The second generation was concerned with getting as much education as possible. Unlike the Chinese group, stagnant and over-age, the Japanese were quietly, persistently pushing themselves ahead, making use of every economic and educational opportunity possible. As a result, perhaps, they were much disliked, a dislike fanned by the Native Sons' groups, whose state organization had for many years made a fetish of anti-Japanese publicity.

What happened to California's Americans of Japanese ancestry is now a major chapter of national history.⁷ Descanso did not rise to the heights of violent prejudice exhibited in some localities of the state, but neither did it establish any record for tolerance. It shivered over all the stories of samurai swords in cellars and short-wave sets in Shinto temples. Its average citizen saw nothing alarming, for a few months at least, in the proposal that all American citizens of Japanese ancestry be deported to Japan! It took a Supreme Court decision and the record of Nisei combat units on our military fronts to open his eyes to his error. Now he is inclined to say, "Well, of course we have to give every citizen his rights." Pushed further, he will admit that the loyal alien resident has some rights, too; and, pushed to the wall, he will admit that his objections to Japanese-Americans had some economic motivation. The calm and rather amiable reception given the first former resident of Japanese ancestry to show his face in the city indicated that Descanso may even feel a vague shame for its former attitude—although it would never admit so openly.

Both Negro and Oriental racial groups in Descanso have existed as small isolated islands in the community, little cysts in the body politic, far too small in numbers and influence to exer-

⁷ Carey McWilliams, *Prejudice*, Little, Brown, 1944.

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cise a decisive role. None of them presents to Descanso a problem which it feels it must solve. None is in a position to exercise direct or indirect political influence. None is large enough to constitute, in the form of a labor supply, an item on the costs sheets of its principal industries. It is perfectly possible that these groups might exist in the future much as they have for many years in the past, walled off from the large community and from one another, permanently excluded from integration but not from an accommodation which permits their group survival.

It remained for Descanso to allow ideas of caste to collect around another group which was large in numbers and important as a source of cheap labor. "Caste ideas" in the sense in which they were applied toward the Mexican consisted of a jumble of notions, often conflicting and not consistently applied, but tending to establish a central point: that he was inherently fitted only for an inferior role. The reason given for this alleged permanent incapacity was that of his racial origins. His partially Indian ancestry, his *mestizo* make-up, it was said, limited him in achievement, and would limit his children and his children's children, as well. The corollary was that he, and his children's children, would do well to be content with second- or third-grade housing, education, and occupational opportunities.

Descanso did not invent this idea; it was, for the most part, not even conscious of applying it. If any group of its citizens had risen to state, publicly, in 1910, "Now, see here, we have a dependable source of cheap labor, which we are going to need for a long time. Let's see that it stays put, without any of this nonsense about equal opportunity," such a group would have been the immediate object of community disapproval. Descanso's tradition of being casually generous, its pride in being the sort of town where one man was as good as another, would have been outraged. But, when the same thing was done without statements of public policy, without overt compulsion, or without clear definition, then Descanso considered it right and natural. Informally, on thousands of small, seemingly insignificant occasions, Descanso formed its policies. "Public education is all right, but we don't want Mexicans going to the same schools as our children." "I wouldn't hire a Mexican girl as a stenographer if she could do

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five hundred words a minute." "Let Mexicans in this district and you bring down property values." "They wouldn't know what to do with higher pay if they had it." "Why waste education on kids that are going to pick oranges anyway?" "A Mexican doesn't need a relief allowance like whites." "Judge, this Mex run into me, and you know none of them can drive." "I can't send Mexicans out on the same job with whites." "Once a Mex, always a Mex." "They can't learn like other people." "You can't have a Mexican meeting the public." Thousands—millions—of these phrases, echoing down the decades, succeeded in erecting a barrier, while the people erecting it were scarcely conscious of what they did.

If they had an occasional qualm of uncertainty, there were some convenient rationalizations at hand to support them. It was the misfortune of the Mexican to enter the United States at a time when we were indulging in a national orgy of racist philosophy. From 1910 to 1924, the United States was doing a great deal of talking about "inferior" and "unassimilable" populations. It was horrified to find that it had so many, and it expressed its horror in the Immigration Act of 1924, where curtailing of future immigration was put quite frankly on a racial basis. It read popular articles and even opinions by men of some reputation in which the subject of race was put on a frenetic basis strongly reminiscent of Nazi Germany. Its popular prophets were men like Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard; the phrases of their book titles, like *The Rising Tide of Color* and *The Passing of the Great Race*, became part of everyday speech. Descanso read along with the rest of the country, and discovered that, if you could assume a group was racially inferior, the cherished rules of American democracy could be diluted in application toward that group, and no pangs of conscience need result.

And how did you distinguish such a group? Chiefly because of the fact that they "looked different" and continued to "look different" after the passage of two or three generations, particularly if they were barred from intermarriage. Descanso had already experimented, with considerable success, in creating small caste groups of Orientals, Negroes, and Indians. It realized that it could have no success at all with descendants of European immi-

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grants, who, after a generation, could not be distinguished from "anybody else." Much later, it was to make an essay at applying caste thinking to the Okie, only to realize that Okie with a good job, a nice car, and a decent suit of clothes could not be distinguished, superficially, from the grandson of a pioneer. But the Mexican, appearing in large numbers, with a dark skin and a status as a labor pawn, could hardly have avoided falling afoul of race caste thinking in the twenties. Speculation after the fact is somewhat fruitless, but it at least is interesting to ponder the question of whether the Mexican, had he entered the United States via Ellis Island, before the turn of the century, and had settled in the Atlantic and Middle Western states, would have been any more subject to caste limitations than the Italian. Certainly, among the Mexican's handicaps may be counted those of geography and chronology—he came to a section of the country where caste feeling was strong against the Negro and the Oriental, and he came at a period when racist philosophies were having a heyday.

All this does not imply that Descanso, or any other community in the Southwest, ever succeeded in creating, for the Mexican, as sharp and well-defined a caste as it had for the Negro or the Oriental. There were always loopholes, and they varied with time and place. If there is anything which distinguishes public thinking about the Mexican and his descendants in the Southwest, it is confusion and contradiction. From one point of view, he is merely a late immigrant, encountering the usual immigrant difficulties. From another point of view, he represents the people from whom the area was taken away; he is a descendant of the conquered. For those suckled on the Madison Grant philosophy, he is a member of an inferior race. It is perfectly possible for the average Anglo-American to hold all three views simultaneously—subconsciously he probably does—but he is more likely to prefer the one which best suits the point he is trying to establish at the moment. I have heard a man dismiss the question of the Mexican-American as "just another immigrant problem—no question of race"; and, five days later, I have heard the same man arguing heatedly against use of a public plunge by persons of

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Mexican descent on the ground that "it will lead to intermarriage, and we don't want racial mixture."

There are Mexican-Americans who can honestly say that they have never encountered any of the cruder forms of discrimination, although they may have been aware of some of the subtler ones. There are others who encounter barriers only infrequently—and, like lightning, such visitations seldom strike in the same place twice. Then there are others, just as presentable personally, just as well-educated and successful, who have had to fight their way through a maze of prejudice and segregation. Consistency, as well as rule and reason, are conspicuously lacking from the whole picture. Anyone who wants to make a good case for absence of semi-caste restrictions can cite a hundred cases—the only flaw in his argument is that a million can be cited on the other side. It is safe to say that the entire population of Mexican descent, including those who have been relatively untouched personally, is aware of barriers against it. Reactions may vary from resentment to defeatism, according to personalities—but I have yet to encounter, from the most successful Monticello Avenue merchant to the humblest old fruit-picker in the *barrio pequeño*, any lack of awareness.

An attractive young woman said, "You know, because of my appearance [white skin and hazel eyes], I never thought discrimination could touch *me*. It never had. But, last week, my husband wanted to give me a birthday party at C—'s Café. We were refused service at the bar. They said, 'We don't serve Mexicans.' A nice birthday present!" An extremely successful man, by colony standards, said, "I don't know why it is, but I've had to fight ever since I first crossed the threshold of a public school. Even now, I seldom sit down in a restaurant without expecting the waiter to come up and say, 'Sorry, we can't serve you.' I'm careful to go where I know such things won't happen, but I still half expect them." But an equally successful man, equally Mexican in appearance, said: "Discrimination has never touched me or my family. Well, once, in Texas, but one expects it from those dumb Texans. Still, I can't say that I expect it never *will*." The old orange-picker said: "Discrimination? Well, I can tell you only *El*

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*Patron Arriba*⁸ shows none. I keep to myself and my own people—it is the only thing to do.” The young college-graduate said: “Discrimination? Of course, all of my life, since I was a little boy. I make my way, I enjoy myself, I have good Anglo-American friends, in spite of it, but I never forget. At nights, sometimes, or if I’m discouraged, it turns in my mind like a worm.”

And now for the other side of town. A businessman says: “I’m for giving everybody a fair chance, but will you tell me what good it does to educate the average Mexican? They just don’t take to it.” Another businessman, expressing himself strongly in favor of slum-clearance and low-cost housing in the Monticello district, ends his statement with: “Good housing will keep them in their own part of town and stop this moving up in our section.” A clubwoman remarks: “Of course, I pride myself on my tolerance, but I simply won’t have my daughters attending a youth center where there are Mexicans.” A police officer says, in astonishment: “You want to know why we list offenders of Italian extraction as Americans and offenders of Mexican extraction as Mexicans? Well, they *are* Mexicans. No, I don’t mean they’re citizens of Mexico—most of them aren’t. But they’re *Mexicans*. You know what I mean.” An employer says, “Sure, I’m hiring skilled Mexicans now. I’ve got a war contract and I have to—some damn fool order of Roosevelt’s. But I never had Mexicans before, and I’m not going to have them after the war. A Mexican’s a darned good worker, but you don’t want too many of them around in top positions.” An employee of a state agency says: “I like Mexicans personally, but, I can tell you, if two names came up on a civil service list, one American and one Mexican, I’d take the American every time. It’s just common sense.” A schoolteacher: “My friends think I’m crazy to want to teach in a Mexican school. But I love the little bugs, even though I know they haven’t the capacity.” A public official: “This town will never stand for Mexicans in the same pool with white kids. Okies? But Okies are white.”

There is nothing Descanso will deny more stoutly than any intention of keeping its Mexican-Americans disadvantaged in

⁸ Tr.: The Master Above.

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order to derive an economic gain from their position. That is why it resents the words caste or semi-caste being applied to its practices. Descanso argues, rather, that the bulk of its Mexican-Americans are so low in type that they could not profit by advantage. It seems rather odd to prove this point by making sure that they have continued inferior advantage, but Descanso sees no hint of a vicious circle in this procedure. The "low type" of Mexican, says Descanso, is getting about what he deserves. If he encounters segregated schooling, segregation in use of public facilities, unequal employment opportunities, unequal pay for equal work, or prejudiced law-enforcement and justice—what of it? Descanso does not see that, in making these and a thousand other decisions, it is casting a vote that amends, not only the rights and liberties of a certain group, but the very nature of its democratic procedure. Descanso would not think of revising a certain historic document so that it guaranteed life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness somewhat more to "high types" than to "low types." No, says Descanso, we are just making a few social distinctions, several million of which cannot possibly affect a democracy. You have to recognize, argues Descanso, that some people are just born inferior, generation after generation. As the leader of a church study group put it, "there are always hewers of wood and drawers of water."

Descanso has an intimation, though, that things have changed since the beginning of the century; it has heard of some of the changes. A new science, genetics, devoting itself to the study of hereditary transmission, has come into being. A new point of view, emphasizing the interdependence of the world and of all the races and cultures in it, has arisen out of the sufferings of a second World War. The old prophets are not wanted, even in Descanso. A copy of *The Rising Tide of Color*, worn ragged by eager readers of the twenties and thirties, stands idle on Descanso's public library shelf today—but *Brothers Under the Skin*⁹ circulates briskly. However, the new thought is new. It is so new that it is shocking, to a generation accustomed to order its little world in terms of "old stock" superiority. The new ideas trickle

⁹ Carey McWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin*, Little, Brown, 1942.

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in slowly. The very defensiveness, confusion, and emotion with which Descanso greets them is ample proof of how strong the old conditioning is. And even after they are accepted in theory, it is another long step to implement them with action. But Descanso has crossed a boundary when it asks—naively, belligerently, wonderingly, or thoughtfully—the question, “Do you mean we should take them in like anybody else?” It has admitted a possibility, no matter how grudgingly. It has a hunch that the world and the times are changing.

CHAPTER III

THE NEWCOMERS

Why They Came

THE MEXICANS, the new actors in Descanso's community drama, began entering its stage shortly before 1910. They came in small numbers at first, and they slipped in through the up-stage wings. No spotlight was focused on them for quite a while. An engrossing drama called *Expansion and Development* was still being played at the front of the stage. The newcomers seemed just another of the army of supernumeraries who had moved for three decades in the background of the play—humble people, carrying picks, hoes, and shovels. The action could not have gone on without them, but they were not noticed much more than the scenery. However, the latest arrivals began to come in increasingly large numbers. They stayed. They took up large areas of stage space, and they showed signs of beginning to participate in the main action. Descanso found the spotlight slipping over to something called *The Mexican Problem*.

In 1910, no one had even thought to count the newcomers. Accurate figures on the extent of Mexican immigration to the United States are impossible to obtain. Records at the border were not carefully kept, as they were at Ellis Island, for instance. There was a great deal of illegal entry, tacitly if not actively connived at by labor contractors. Neither was accurate count kept of Mexicans returning to Mexico. Best estimates set the figure for Mexican immigration to the United States at 1,050,296 for the period 1910-1930. This is not a large figure, compared to the four and a half million Italians, the five and a half million Germans, and the four and a half million Irish which this country had received. However, the million and some Mexican immigrants settled, on the whole, in a few Southwest states which were them-

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selves thinly settled. The population composition of many a state and municipality was thereby greatly changed. Dr. McLean has put the extent of immigration vividly by asking us to imagine that all the inhabitants of five Mexican states adjoining our border—Lower California, Sonora, Coahuila, Chihuahua, and Nuevo León—had suddenly abandoned their homes and moved northward in a body.¹ Numerically, this is what happened. And most of this body of people, constituting roughly an eighth of the total population of Mexico, moved into three of our Southwest states, California, Arizona, and Texas.

Why did they move? The common explanation given in Descanso is that they came to escape unbearable conditions of civil strife in Mexico. Descanso, in common with the rest of the United States, takes pride in our national role as a haven for the oppressed. It is a satisfying role, that of a great nation so free and strong that it could open its borders and its arms to everyone, and it is a role given great emphasis in the public schools of the land. It is usually emphasized, however, that the role is one that belongs to the past. We have shown no contemporary disposition to open our arms wide to the homeless and dispossessed of Europe, even when they were in danger of wholesale eradication.

Immigrants themselves have been the chief contributors to this picture of the United States as a haven—from the Irish peasant with his three grains of corn to the East European Jew with his memories of pogroms. The Mexican immigrant in Descanso is no exception. "Why did I come to the United States?" runs a typical life story. "Why, because the times were very bad in my home. I was an *arriero*.² I went down to Michoacán and bought corn and brought it back to my town to sell. In the mountain passes, we were always in danger of our lives, during the wars. Even the soldiers set to guard the trail tried to kill and rob us. After the bad fight we had with the soldiers in the pass near El Corral, I said to my brother: 'Let's go away. It's just a matter of time before we are killed, this way. Let's go to the United States.'"

An old woman said: "I came with my sons. They were just boys. They had been up in the hills with the rebels. The rebels

¹ Robert N. McLean, *That Mexican*, Revell, 1929, p. 85.

² *arriero*: a carter or freighter.

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used to send them with money down to the towns to buy supplies—the boys could go where men could not. I told them, ‘You’ll just get killed with those men. You’re too little to fight. Let’s go away.’ So we went with some people from our town who were going to the United States. At the immigration office, they asked the boys how old they were. The one who was sixteen said twenty-one. Then the one who was fourteen, he said twenty-one, too. ‘Twins!’ said the American officer, and laughed. He knew they were lying but he didn’t care. But they went right out and got jobs like men.”

A man with a small, prosperous neighborhood business in Descanso’s Mexican colony said: “I was always a shopkeeper. I had a little *tienda*³ in Salamanca. During the bad times, it was cleaned out, first by one side and then the other. People didn’t have money to pay. I couldn’t get any supplies. I said to my wife, ‘Anything is better than this. I’m going to the United States, even if I have to sweep streets when I get there.’ And that’s just what I did do—sweep streets—for six months in Tucson.”

But, as the immigrant’s life story unfolds, a new factor appears in the picture—the labor contractor from the United States. “But why the United States?” I asked the *ex-arriero*, “Why not another part of Mexico, or even Central or South America, where the language and the life was like yours?” He looked amazed. “But there were jobs,” he said, “I knew there were jobs there. I had talked, just before my last trip, to a man in the market place at Irapuato. He was a *pocho*⁴ from California. They had sent him down just to tell men about jobs. He said, ‘Bring your brothers, bring your cousins, I can get all of them jobs. My friends will meet you just over the little hill by the immigration office in El Paso.’ And do you know, when we walked out of the *Inmigración*⁵ and over that little hill, there were twenty or thirty men, like the one I had met, all yelling, ‘Brother, *compadre* [comrade], this way! You want to go to California? I can send you! You want money? I have a job for you, everything furnished!’ They lied about the

³ *tienda*: a small grocery store.

⁴ *pocho*: literally, faded, a term applied to “California Mexicans,” i.e., Californians of Mexican descent.

⁵ *Inmigración*: “immigration,” used to designate the immigration office.

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kinds of jobs, and they took our money—but there were jobs to be had, they were right about that.”

The *tienda*-keeper had read an employment handbill, printed in El Paso, which had come to him in a box of imported matches. The old lady talked to her neighbors, who had talked to a Mexican from the United States at a *barrio* fiesta in Aguascalientes—he, too, would see them over the little hill in El Paso. In every immigrant story, the labor contractor appears, directly or indirectly. There was a strong pull of labor-soliciting from the United States, as well as the impulse to leave the disorder in Mexico. It is perfectly conceivable that, had Brazil, for instance, been expanding and industrializing at this time, and the United States suffering from a labor surplus, boatloads of Mexicans would have been embarking from Vera Cruz for the south. Distance seems to be less of a factor than need. Certainly our labor contractors and steamship companies had previously experienced no difficulty in spreading the word of our expanding labor market to little Polish villages and faraway prefectures in Japan. It might be well to remind ourselves, rather frequently, that we needed our immigrants as much as they needed us—perhaps more. The Statue of Liberty may symbolize a charitable act of giving refuge, but we importuned, far and wide, for refugees.

Conditions in Mexico had been chaotic throughout the nineteenth century, but we had no mass immigration from Mexico during that time. The Wars of the Reform had made of Mexico a bloody and constant battlefield for years. They had culminated in foreign intervention—the Maximilian and Carlotta episode—and intervention had culminated in a fierce uprising. Even the “days of peace” of Porfirio Díaz had been maintained by techniques we would consider tantamount to terrorism.⁶ During all these unsettled times, there had been no flight of Mexicans, to any extent, over our southern borders. Such immigration had been a mere trickle, compared to that we were receiving from Europe. The common man of Mexico had stayed put and let the storm break over him.

⁶ For an account of the period from the Revolution of Ayutla to the close of the Díaz regime, see Herbert Ingram Priestley, *The Mexican Nation*, Macmillan, 1926, pp. 317-393.

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As a matter of fact, it was during those peaceful days of Porfirio Díaz, when Mexico was being pointed out as a paragon of law and order, that immigration to the United States first got under way. Díaz and his *rurales*⁷ were governing with a firm hand in the years 1900-1910, yet during those years California's Mexican population quadrupled. California had recovered from its deflation of the nineties and set about developing new resources which required a big labor force. Zapata was just a small rancher in Morelos, which was at peace under the heel of the *hacienda* system in 1900-1910, but Kansas' Mexican population jumped from 71 to 9,429. Kansas City was a focal point for the distribution of track laborers to the booming Santa Fe system. Texas, just beginning to interest herself in the possibilities of irrigated land, received as large a proportionate increase of Mexicans from 1900-1910 as she did from 1910-1920. The flight of an aging dictator to Vera Cruz in May of 1911 did not determine the quadrupling of Colorado's Mexican population in the next few years, but the opening of rich coal veins near Trinidad did. To trace the story of Mexican immigration to the United States is to trace the rise of great regional industries—railroading, mining, citrus growing, sugar beet plantations, winter vegetable and cotton harvests. The flow of Mexican population into each state coincides with its emerging development and prosperity.

"They came because they were needed" is a legend which might well be erected over the Mexican settlements in many a southwestern town. If there is any doubt about the validity of this sentiment, in the minds of the townspeople, it could be supplemented by a text culled from the hearings on the Box and Harris bills, which proposed, in 1925, to put Mexican immigration on a quota basis. Nothing could be more emphatic than the statements of southwest industrialists and agriculturists that the Mexican laborer was fundamental to their prosperity; nothing could be more sincere than their wails at the prospect of being deprived of him. And perhaps chambers of commerce might see fit to erect a small statue to that unsung hero of the great migration, the man who made the whole thing possible, that shadowy

⁷ *rurales*: rural police.

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intermediary, that shabby go-between—the labor *coyote*.⁸ Circulating quietly in the market place at Irapuato or at the fiesta at Aguascalientes, zealously shepherding his flock down from the hill near the *Inmigración*, or deftly dropping a word as to how it was possible to swim the Rio Grande at night, he has no little responsibility for the shining rails, the great orchards, and fertile fields of the Southwest. It is due to him, in great measure, that Juan Sanchez is no longer an *arriero* in the mountains of Michoacán.

Who They Were

It is a staple article of belief throughout the Southwest that the Mexican immigrant was the “lowest” of any group to enter this country. It is a belief shared not only by the exploiters of Mexican labor, to whom it might be expected to come naturally, but by educators, clergymen, social workers—the friendly and sympathetic as well as the inalterably prejudiced. Inasmuch as the Southwest had almost no previous experience with immigrant groups, it might be only fair to ask with what criteria they made their judgment. As has been pointed out, the tendency to grade any immigrant group as “low” is strong, and recent arrivals are likely to be considered “lower” than those who came earlier. The Mexican might have received his low rating simply because he was the only immigrant to settle in the Southwest in large numbers.

For Europeans entering through Atlantic ports, some statistics were kept, and it has been possible to judge these immigrant groups comparatively, on such grounds as literacy, health, money in the pocket, previous occupational status, age, and family composition. Thus one could say that the south Italians possessed, on the whole, less literacy than the north Italians, or that the Bulgarians left their wives behind more often than did the Croats—if such comparisons constituted pertinent grounds for judging immigrant desirability.

On such matters as character, stamina, vision, judgment, ideals, and cultural values—possibly more important in the long run

⁸ *coyote*: in this sense, an exploiter-contractor.

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than money, literacy, or occupation—it was, of course, impossible to make estimates of groups. Quite a bit of pretty writing has been done about the soul of the immigrant, but all of it has been highly imaginative and strongly subjective, with its judgments slanted in favor of those groups who conformed closely to the writer's own background of Anglo-Saxon heritage. Possibly the imponderables, important as they are, can never be judged objectively; certainly they were not with regard to our immigrant groups.

In the case of the Mexican, it is not possible to judge even the ponderables. If it was true that no accurate count of mere numbers entering was kept, it is still more true that no valid estimates were made of his health, his worldly possessions, his skills, or his education. "I walked across the bridge and paid a penny, and then the man asked me my name and age," is the common Mexican account of entry. Many entries were even less formal. This carefree procedure was not entirely the fault of immigration officials; so great was the need for labor in the Southwest that all types of pressures were put upon them to expedite the passage of the Mexican as much as possible. It was even expected that they would not be too zealous in tracking down illegal entrants. After 1924, it is true, enforcement of border regulations was tightened up, but by that time, the bulk of Mexican immigrants had already entered. The opportunity to appraise them by the standards with which European immigrants had been judged had vanished. One could say that they were diseased, or illiterate, or trained only to hold a hoe, or one could say that they were sturdy, that many of them could read and write, and that most of them possessed a cluster of craft skills. There is no documentary proof either way. No one knows. The only possible reconstruction can be made through a series of contacts with individual Mexicans; and, even they, after a lapse of twenty-five years or more, are often hard put to distinguish what they had when they came from what they acquired after they arrived.

Take the matter of literacy. Estimates of the ability of the immigrant Mexican to read and write have run all the way from a group illiteracy of almost 100 per cent to the very sanguine figure of 10 per cent. Those who prefer to think in terms of the immi-

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grant stereotype have, naturally, placed the percentage as high as possible; those with a sympathetic interest in the Mexican have tended to minimize illiteracy. Certainly, considering the state of public education in Mexico during the regime of Porfirio Díaz, it is most unlikely that 90 per cent of a low-income, agricultural group could read and write. But to say that practically none of them could is an equally wild guess. It is probable that the jump in Descanso's illiteracy rate from 5.3 per cent in 1920 to 6.1 in 1930 reflected the absorption of the immigrant Mexican. Descanso's own estimate is that practically none of its Mexicans were literate, but it must be remembered that the man who signs his name with a cross sticks in the memory more than the man who writes his signature.

According to a sampling of immigrant Mexicans, taken in Descanso in 1944, 26 per cent of them had received no schooling and 19 per cent had less than five years. The illiterates in this group constituted 11.1 per cent of the total; all of them were persons who had received no schooling. However, in a larger sampling, which included Mexican-Americans of all generations, illiteracy was exactly that of our national average—4.3 per cent; there were no illiterates outside the members of the immigrant generation.

Of that group which had received no schooling, a surprising number had taught themselves to read and write Spanish—55 per cent. They all said that they had taught themselves, with the help of a literate friend and a few books or newspapers. Most of them had begun the learning process in Mexico, and had completed it in the United States. The account of a sixty-year-old laborer is fairly typical: "When I was ten, I went to work herding sheep. I had never been to school in my life, but there were people in my town who had. When I had so much time, nothing to do but sit and look at the sheep, I thought I would like to read. I went to a lady in town, and she gave me the first book, the primer. It had pictures with words under them. I learned all the words with the pictures first, then I guessed at what the other words were. For hours and days and months, I guessed at those words, and after a while I thought I had guessed them right. When I went back to town at the end of the season, I took the book

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to the lady and read it to her. I made very few mistakes. She said, 'Why, Pedro, you can read! Who helped you?' I said, '*Señora, El Patron Arriba!* It was true, He had. But I didn't learn to write until after I came to the United States. Even now I read and write very slowly, and English is something beyond me.'

If little is known about the achievements and capacities of the Mexican immigrant, less is known about the background from which he came. In 1910, it was not yet the fashion for anthropologists and sociologists to examine contemporary groups, unless they happened to be primitives. Even today, most studies of this sort are confined to communities within the United States, its Middletowns and Yankee Cities. As someone has said, Latin America is a dark continent, sociologically. For accounts of its life, we have to depend on its literature and on the observations of travelers and visitors, many of them intuitive and perceptive but all of them impressionistic, relying for their effect on dramatic outlines rather than careful detail. From the best of them, it is all but impossible to gather an explicit account of the life of the common people—how they bring up their children, how they determine status within their group, how they deal with everyday crises.

Like the immigrant soul, the Latin soul or the *mestizo* soul has received many poetic attentions. Metaphysical yearnings and great, surging rushes of emotion have been attributed to it, as well as fatalism, apathy, and a tendency to live from day to day. All these may be very true, but inasmuch as the appraisals were made either by persons totally outside Latin-American culture, or by representatives of its urban upper classes, it is only reasonable to expect that they have left the imprint of their own standards and emotions. They were the more likely to do so as their examination of the groups of which they spoke was either perfunctory or superficial. For most of the people in this world, life is a matter of detail, humdrum, exacting, and routine, even though it may also be satisfying and stimulating. Babies have to be cared for, food procured and prepared, dwellings secured, the young mated, and the dead buried. Out of the thousands of details of this sort, in any culture, patterns begin to emerge, ways of living grouped about major needs. Some

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patterns are given great importance, others are comparatively slighted. What is important to one culture is not necessarily so to another, and that which was slighted a hundred years ago may assume a major role today. When one sees what the patterns are and where the emphasis falls, only then, it seems to me, may one begin to talk of souls, aspirations, and temperaments. And, even so, the danger of generalizing from one's own point of view is great.

Primitive survival groups in Mexico had long attracted the attention of ethnologists and anthropologists. European men of science, like Lumholtz, had made their way, by horseback and burro, over the mountain trails that led to the homes of Indian peoples, like the Tarahumaras, the Tepehuanes, and the Tarascans. Their successors, European, American, and Mexican specialists, also concentrated their energies on these groups, who were as truly primitive as any South Sea tribe. They were right in doing so, for studies of these peoples, together with the exploration of Mexico's archaeological sites, furnished, for Mexico, her link with the past and, for the world, an understanding of civilizations that had flourished long before the coming of the white man. But, as a basis of knowing the life of the common people of Mexico, such studies are useful only in a very incidental way.

It is common for Descanso to refer to its immigrant Mexicans as "pure Indian." In this way, it is supposed to be possible to distinguish them from older residents of Mexican extraction, who are popularly supposed to be "pure Spanish." And, of course, anyone could draw the conclusion that a "pure Indian" was bound to be "lower" than a "pure Spaniard." It has been pointed out that the bulk of the Spanish and Mexican colonists were *mestizos*, the products of a genetic mixture which had been going on for several hundred years. The bulk of Mexican immigrants to the United States were also *mestizos*, products of the same genetic mixture continued for seventy years more.

The very names of the towns from which Descanso's immigrants came—Irapuato, Parral, Salamanca, Valle de Santiago, León, Aguascalientes—are indicative of remoteness from Indian life. These are towns near the center of things. They lie along the main communication routes; they are trading centers or capi-

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tals. Some of them are as large as 20,000; few of them are under 3,000. Descanso's immigrants had lived in them or near them all of their lives, and contacts with Indians who lived in remote valleys had been both infrequent and casual. "I used to see Indians on market days," said one woman from Michoacán. "They spoke their own language and they dressed differently. They came into town in the mornings and went away again at night. Indians do not have much to do with us Mexicans. They call us *vecinos*, the neighbors, and are friendly enough. But they like to keep by themselves and they live far away." "I used to go into Indian towns on my trips," said an *arriero*. "Sometimes we stayed in such a town overnight. I used to listen to their language, that sounded like chains clinking, but I never learned any of it."

I fairly scoured Descanso's Mexican colony for someone of the immigrant generation who might have come from an Indian village. Owners of *tiendas* canvassed their customers; one family in almost every block made a point of inquiring from neighbors; we did everything but offer a reward. Finally two prospects were unearthed. One was a man about sixty, who called himself an Opata. He prided himself on being "pure Indian" rather than Mexican, but he could recall almost nothing of Indian life. He had been brought to Nogales, Sonora, as a small child and to Bisbee, Arizona, when he was fifteen. The other was an old woman, in her seventies, who said that she had been born in the Tarascan town of Parangaricúti. But she had left there, with "neighbors," when she was eight, had gone to Irapuato, Guanajuato, where she married and reared a family. She, too, could recall nothing of Indian life or language.

The whole pattern of Mexican migration made it unlikely that many Indians would join the army of laborers coming to the United States. Labor contractors do not go to inaccessible villages, nor does word of them travel there. People who have kept to themselves for generations do not rush off in quest of the new—it takes the up-and-coming fellow, the *arriero*, for that. But this does not mean that, in Descanso's *colonia*, you will not see as "pure Indian" a face as ever appeared in the pages of an ethnologist's monograph. Very often, you will see it in the same family with as "pure Spanish" a face as ever looked out of a canvas by

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Velasquez. It is a common saying that every family has two daughters, a "Blanca" and a "Prieta," a light one and a dark one. In any large family or in any large gathering, one can see visible evidence of the two strains that produced the *mestizo* fusion.

Had the immigration originated in areas closer to Mexico City, the old Aztec capital, it might have included people who, although by no means members of primitive tribes, yet retained in their speech and their village customs many traces of the old civilization. Here, the impress of Aztec culture was strongest and here it persisted in spite of the domination of the conqueror. Studies made in such towns as Tepoztlan and Teotihuacán show that the ancient ways, although they are passing, are still inextricably mingled with the new. Stuart Chase's popular book, *Mexico, a Study of Two Americas*, parts of which were based on Robert Redfield's study of Tepoztlan, describes vividly how the antique and the modern are interlaced.⁹ But, for the purpose of understanding the background of Descanso's immigrants, such books are only partially helpful, for few of the Mexicans who came to the United States had lived in areas within the bounds of the Aztec confederacy.

You will not find people in Descanso who heard the *chirimía*¹⁰ played on feast days, or the voice of the *huehuechilque*¹¹ summoning worshipers in a traditional chant. Nor did they speak the old greeting to foot travelers, "*Yenican anmiuca, amehuantztzin*,"¹² still heard in Morelos. Mexican immigration to the United States originated chiefly in the states of Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Jalisco,¹³ never under Aztec control. While ancient ways of life in these localities undoubtedly had much in common with Aztec culture, they lacked the homogeneity and organization to permit

⁹ Stuart Chase, *Mexico, a Study of Two Americas*, Macmillan, 1931. Robert Redfield, *Tepoztlan, a Mexican Village*, University of Chicago Press, 1930.

¹⁰ *chirimía*: a pre-Conquest musical instrument.

¹¹ *huehuechilque*: a traditional functionary who summons people to pay their contributions for a fiesta. Redfield, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

¹² *Yenican anmiuca, amehuantztzin*: a greeting in the Nahuatl language; it means, "Now here you go along, gentlemen," and is used when one group of foot travelers overtakes another. Redfield, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

¹³ See Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, University of Chicago Press, 1930, p. 13. In Descanso, however, the three most common states of origin were Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Aguascalientes.

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language and custom to survive as they did in the heart of the confederacy. Isolated survival groups remain today, but in the *mestizo* towns, pre-Conquest speech and social organization have disappeared. This does not mean that *mestizo* life does not contain many traits which could be traced to pre-Conquest origin—the use of the *tamale* for celebrations is one; it simply means that ancient custom, as a recognizable entity, does not exist in a *mestizo* town.

It was from these towns that people came to the United States. Few of them are tiny villages; most of them are good-sized places, with populations of over 3,000 persons. They lie along the pathways of travel and trade. Descanso, in common with the rest of the Southwest, is under the impression that its Mexicans came from the most backward and remote regions. "I suppose," a rather thoughtful educator remarked, "that they must have been like our hill-billies, or the backwoods farmer—cut off from things." "I'd venture to say," said a schoolteacher, "that most of these parents never saw a town in their lives until they got to the United States." It is true that Irapuato in Guanajuato, or Parral in Chihuahua, were not, in 1910, bustling places like Abilene, Bisbee, or Descanso itself. They had the settled, slow-paced quality of many European towns, but they were urban, according to the standards of the country in which they were set. The people who lived in them or near them were not "cut off from things."

In Mexico, as in Europe, it is possible to follow a rural occupation and still be a town-dweller. People live in towns and go outside of them to work. Even the smaller places, designated in the census as *ranchos* and *pueblos*,¹⁴ often cluster, like so many chicks, around the outskirts of a *ciudad*.¹⁵ The open-country pattern of the United States, with its individual farms set apart from one another, is unknown in Mexico. Life for the rural worker in Mexico is essentially a community rather than an individual affair. Even the small *ranchero*, the closest approach to our independent farmer, is likely to live in a town and work his acres from a distance. The old *hacienda*, or great estate, centered

¹⁴ *pueblos*: larger villages.

¹⁵ *ciudad*: a city.

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around its village, often a very sizable one; so does its successor, the *ejido*, or communal farm.

It has been taken for granted that most of the Mexicans who came to the United States in the early part of this century were displaced *hacienda* workers, torn from their moorings by the revolution. This may be true, but has not been proved true in Descanso. The passage of time, may, however, have distorted the picture. In the sampling taken, the 15 per cent of the immigrants who said they had been *hacienda* workers were all older men, none younger than fifty-eight and three over seventy. It must be remembered that the mature man who left Mexico in 1910 is now an old man; many of his generation have died. There is a large quasi-immigrant group in Descanso, consisting of those who came to the United States as children—they constitute 37 per cent of the total immigrant group. They were too young to have had occupations when they left, and their memories of a parent's occupation are inclined to be vague. Fifty-seven per cent of the immigrant group was under twenty, upon coming to the United States; only a few of the young males in this group had been attached to a *hacienda*.

Out of the remaining group, men now ranging in age from their middle fifties to their late seventies, slightly over a third had been *hacienda* workers. The remaining skills and occupations ran a surprising gamut. A large number, almost another third, said they had been *arrieros* or had worked for *arrieros*. Either Descanso's *colonia* is, accidentally, a nest of *arrieros*, or it may be true that the *arriero*, as a man who got around and knew what was going on, was more disposed to emigrate. Several had been woodcutters, some had sold charcoal or milk. Many from the Irapuato district, in Guanajuato, had been share workers on strawberry farms. Guanajuato also produced several *viajeros*, men who bought goods in one town and sold it in another. Some had been shoemakers, or stonemasons, or muleteers. Others, particularly from the north of Mexico, had worked in mines or herded cattle. Occupations which involved a degree of travel, at least from one town to another, predominated; but every man had a home base, a spot in which his family lived and to which

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he returned frequently. Often, this spot had attached to it a few *milpas*, small fields worked for subsistence.

In talking with men of the older immigrant generation, I was impressed by the fact that most of them had possessed, at one time in their lives, a considerable number of skills. True, these were not skills adapted to our economy, which has come to demand the single, specialized operation. They were probably not highly efficient or highly developed skills even of their kind, and their possessors have not used them or thought about them for twenty-three years or more. They do not represent any basis for retraining or rehabilitation of the older or the displaced worker, but they do constitute an interesting commentary on the difference between life in a rural economy, where being a jack-of-all-trades is an asset, and that in a highly industrialized nation, where even agriculture is industrialized. Most immigrants had at some time in their lives performed several of the following operations: making adobes, building a house, making or repairing sandals, burning charcoal, shoeing mules or horses, repairing harness, tanning and leather work, irrigating, preparing a field, sowing, simple metal work, building a stone wall, felling lumber, simple veterinary work, making furniture, harvesting, slaughtering and preparing meat.

How much like the skills demanded of our own homesteader, or frontier farmer, these sound! As a matter of fact, they differ only in local detail from the abilities displayed by Descanso's American pioneers—a disproportionate number of whom, it might be added, were also *arrieros*, called freighters. They could also shoe horses, mend harness, build houses, fell trees, tan leather, butcher a steer, or plow a field, and their daily life demanded that they do so often. Change came gradually to them; many of them were gone long before industrialization and specialization arrived in Descanso. But the Mexican who came to the United States jumped five or six decades overnight. What he had learned to do in his old life was of no value to him in the new. In many respects it was a handicap. He had been used to working hard, "like a burro," in his own country, but he had not been used to routine, mechanical drudgery.

What has been said of the occupational background of the

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Mexican could be said about many a European group. In general, our immigrants have come from nations with rural economies. Industrial nations need their workers at home. Furthermore, it has been the marginal agricultural worker, the peasant, if you like, who seized at the opportunity offered by emigration. Millions upon millions of them have come to our shores. When this nation was itself a predominantly agricultural country, their adjustment was not so difficult; their skills and habits of work were not greatly at variance with those of our citizens. For the agriculturally minded, there was still good land obtainable at low cost. But for those who came later, the change involved practically a leap from one century to the next, from a world of crops, plows, and animals to one of blast furnaces and whirling machinery. Even the agricultural worker found himself only a cog in an industrial organization. He could "follow the crops" and perform specific routine jobs at stated times, much as if he were a factory worker operating a drill-press.

While the bulk of our immigrants have been rural, low-income people, there have been individuals in each group of higher status—teachers, tradespeople, clerks, artists, exiled politicians, urban artisans. One of our immigrant groups, that of the Germans who exiled themselves after the unsuccessful revolution of 1848, was made up almost entirely of such persons, who, when they settled in the Middle West, found their backgrounds much superior to those of the Americans who surrounded them. Generally, though, there has been no more than a sprinkling of these educated and sophisticated individuals in immigrant groups, although their value as leaders was out of all proportion to their numbers. Descanso's *colonia* contains such men. Their numbers are small, but into their hands fall, time after time, the direction and guidance of community life.

CHAPTER IV

ACCULTURATION—AMERICAN STYLE

"Culture"

THE WORD culture has several different meanings, and the sense in which it is used in this book is the one in which it is least understood in Descanso. When Descanso was growing out of its roughshod pioneer era, it began to add a few embellishments to its civic life which were vaguely, and sometimes none too flatteringly, known as culture. There was the opera house, where readings by Madame Alla Nazimova could be enjoyed by the theatrically minded. There were Browning circles, and French study clubs, and the Friday Afternoon Circle, whose members "gave papers" on "The Story of the Persian Rug" or "Early Colonial Architecture." This sort of culture was regarded as something extraneous and highly impractical, as an innocuous feminine activity, in a class with tatting lace and making hooked rugs. No practical man would regard it with anything except amusement. No wise wife would insult her husband by suggesting that he become "cultured."

While this definition was later enlarged to include reading the Book-of-the-Month selections, being able to sit through an evening of classical music, or taking an interest in modern painting, it was still well confined to the range of the fine arts. It was thought of as an adjunct, if not a superfluity, to ordinary life, as "women's stuff," something no hardheaded man could concern himself in without risking loss of face. That Bill Daley, mechanic for the Santa Fe shops, had a cultural heritage; or that Joe Tortoise, who came in from the reservation to get drunk every Saturday night, had another; or that Juan Sanchez, track laborer in the Monticello district, had still another, would have been inconceivable. The concept of culture as a way of living, as a sum total

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of habit patterns for a group—including everything from the way they hold their forks to the way they regard their god—was an idea not introduced to Descanso, even in textbooks, until rather recently.

So new is the idea that it has a tendency, similar to that noted in the field of genetics, to stay in the textbook and not to be applied to everyday life. Descanso's reaction to the word culture is, first, that it has something to do with art, and, second, that it is "sissy." An attempt to establish a branch of an organization bearing in its title the word inter-cultural was tabled rather summarily by the Chamber of Commerce; it later developed that many members had been under the impression that it was "some kind of an art project." I finally had to abandon the title "The Cultural Background of the Mexican-American" as an introduction to talking about ways of life in Mexico and the United States. Too often someone came up afterward, to say in disappointment, "But we thought it was going to be about arts and crafts!"

If so much confusion exists over the word culture, it is not surprising, even when the point has been made that you are concerned with living habits and not basketwork per se, that innumerable further misunderstandings arise. The temptation to mix culture with race, as concepts, is apparently irresistible. "You've made it so clear," one listener told me, "why the Mexicans live the way they do. It's just in their blood." The colossal boner pulled by a law-enforcement officer in Los Angeles, who stated that Mexican-Americans were inherently lawless because the Aztecs had practiced human sacrifice, can be matched in kind any day in Descanso, and is probably caused by similarly injudicious swallowing of a reading list. A missionary circle which had just read Spinden's *Ancient Civilizations of Mexico and Central America* offered the opinion that "no wonder we make converts so slowly, with all that paganism in their blood." The point that ways of life are not passed on at the moment of conception, by the "blood" or by the genes, like blue eyes and curly hair, is a tremendously difficult one to make. The nearest it comes of acceptance, with the average Descanso citizen, is a wondering, "Is that really so?"

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To several persons and groups of persons, this question was put: "If you had been left as a foundling of three weeks in a small town in Mexico and reared by a Mexican family, would you be distinguishable in any way, except that of physical appearance, from the average Mexican immigrant?" "Yes!" was the immediate reply, prompt as a knee jerk. "In what ways?" was the next question. All of the persons realized that they would be Spanish- instead of English-speaking, and that they would have been reared in the Catholic faith. Some said that they would not be so well educated, would not know a trade or a profession, but they added that they would be "more ambitious." "Why?" "Because it would be in my blood." Quite a few insisted that their ideas of morals and family life would be different from the Mexican pattern (or from their imaginations of it) and gave the reason of "blood awareness" for this difference. All of them agreed that they would have progressed more rapidly after coming to the United States than the average Mexican immigrant had. "Because your lighter skin would give you a social advantage?" the interviewer asked. "Oh, no," was the reply of three-fourths of the group, "I'd just be smarter." "I'd have a feeling for American ways," said many of the others. The interviewer did not add that she had known just such a case; the subject, when last seen as a man of fifty-nine, was working in the lettuce fields of Imperial Valley for twenty cents an hour. Except for red hair and freckles, he was indistinguishable in status and manner from the Mexican field hands with whom he worked. It was felt that Descanso would dismiss the account as a good story, but "tall."

The Extra Baggage

In addition to the few coins in his pockets, the clothes he was wearing, and his bundle of personal possessions, every immigrant who ever entered the United States had some extra baggage. This baggage could not be seen by the customs inspector; it took up no room on ships or trains; it is quite possible that the immigrant himself did not know he was carrying it—at least not until he had been in his new home a few days. This invisible possession was his culture, his way of living. A small amount of it showed

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in the clothes he wore, in his speech, or in his manners. The greater part of it was hidden, bound into a thousand complex habits, responses, and attitudes he had been learning since infancy. He had forgotten when or how he had learned most of them; many were so automatic as to seem instinctive, "second nature"; none of them had ever seemed strange to him, nor had he questioned their usefulness.

In his first experiences with living and earning a living in the United States, he was to meet people whose habits, responses, and attitudes had also been formed since infancy, but formed in a different mold. Their instinctive, unquestioned actions seemed as strange to him as his did to them. In many cases, he could see no good reason for adopting the ways of the new society; to his eyes, they looked strange, foreign, and even dangerous. Such things as co-education and freedom for his daughters were, often, directly counter to every precept of moral, upright living he had learned. But it soon became clear to him that his only hope for status, for the progress and happiness of his family, lay in conforming in every way possible, from small details of speech and dress to large issues of ideals and values, to the society in which he found himself. Only so could he avoid the ridicule and lessened opportunity that arose from being labeled as a foreigner.

Sometimes, he did not choose to remodel himself. He remained stubbornly unreconstructed, the old countryman who was the despair of his second-generation children. Sometimes, he wished hard enough to conform, but found the old habits so ingrained that he could never forget them. Sometimes, by a terrific expense of will and energy, he actually accomplished the transformation, and it was only in moments of weakness or age that nostalgia for the old ways overcame him. But whatever he did, he was conscious of the pressure upon him all the time to make him drop his old living patterns and replace them, as quickly as possible, by those of a strange culture. Like Descanso, the new society gave its approval to the man who was "just like everybody else."

This uprooting of old habit patterns and replacing them by new is one of the most critical experiences through which a human being can pass. Every immigrant life story reflects the tensions, the loneliness, and the bewilderment of the period of

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transition. "I felt like a blind animal, that butts its head against first one wall and then the other," said an elderly laborer; "I didn't know the language, I didn't know the law, the customs, and there was no way to find out except by butting my head and making mistakes." "It wasn't so bad in daytime," said a woman, "when I was busy with my family. But at night, when they were asleep, I would lie in the dark and feel my heart beating hard. I was afraid of something, I didn't know what. The nights I dreamed of Salamanca, my town, I rested better." "When we first came to El Paso," said another woman, "I used to have a nightmare, many nights. It was about being in a big wheel, that swung back and forth, through a blackness and mist. I knew there was nothing beneath me, that if I fell off that wheel I was lost, but still I could hardly hang on. I used to wake up trembling, as if I had been working hard, and weak. It has been years since I dreamed that dream, but I can still remember it." It is a tribute to the tremendous adaptability of human beings that most immigrants accomplish the change as well as they do, considering that they are unguided, subject to hit-or-miss forces, some of them the worst of the new society.

Mexican immigration, by and large, represented that of a folk people, just as the bulk of our European immigration had represented folk people. This does not mean that they were savages, primitives, or preliterates, nor that they were isolated, although they might be rural. Folk people, both in Latin America and in Europe, have a connection with the modern social and economic orders in which they live. They are subject to laws, use commercial products, are aware of the written word although they may not write themselves, and have strong ties with some form of organized religion, usually the Catholic Church. What distinguishes them from the more complex world in which they live is that they have a common body of tradition which is passed on orally from generation to generation. This tradition determines the pattern of their lives; almost everyone conforms to it. It is not necessarily simpler than "civilized" patterns—in some aspects, such as religious and familial organization, it may be infinitely more complex—but the individual has fewer choices than he does

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in a modern society. Tradition sets the pattern and is seldom questioned.

This tradition, while it is not written, is embodied in a thousand proverbs, sayings, folk songs, and folk tales, and in the admonition and example of one generation to the next. The child, in such a society, receives his education for life, not in a school, but in the circle of the extended family, which usually includes aunts, uncles, godparents, cousins and *their* social and blood relatives, as well as his own parents. He is prepared for life by practicing it, under the guidance and example of people close to him. The break between school and home, and again between school and the world in which he earns a living, does not exist for such a child. Lives may be limited in such a society, but they have great continuity. It is typical of folk societies that they have a fixed habitat; families live in the same places for generations, and special customs, special folklore and practices, develop around a particular community. Life may be hard and even mean, but it is stable. Things change slowly.

Such societies are disappearing in Europe, and they are diminishing in Latin America. Modern warfare is fatal to them; and so, in a gentler and slower fashion, are literacy, newspapers, magazines, radios, and moving pictures. As people feel themselves part of a larger world, the authority of the small folk world is broken. This, the shattering of the small world by the impact of the larger, is what happened to our immigrants; but, instead of being spread over decades, it was compressed into a few months or a few years.

Not all immigrants, of course, were folk people. There was a small minority in each group which represented the more sophisticated, the more cultivated, and the more articulate. The Mexican migration, particularly that which came in the later years, has its share of these people—college graduates, teachers, poets, leaders, and politicians, with urban backgrounds or urban experience. They were a leaven in the mass of folk people; but they were not representative, in experience or outlook, of the bulk of the immigrant group.

It is too bad that the typical small *mestizo* town, with its satellite *ranchos* and *pueblos*, has not been the object of study

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by some sociologist or anthropologist. Many primitive Mexican groups have been so examined, as well as one or two folk groups where Aztec custom had strong survival. But life in Sombrerete, Zacatecas, or Celaya, Guanajuato, or Los Reyes, Michoacán, can be reconstructed only from casual observation or from the stories of its former residents. A scientific examination of them, today, might still aid in understanding the background of our Mexican immigrants. The events of the Mexican Revolution and the subsequent educational and agrarian reforms have made changes, it is true, but it is not improbable that a large stock of custom and tradition survives only slightly changed. I have been impressed with the fact that accounts of daily life in these districts, given by agricultural workers recently imported from there, tally in many aspects with the reminiscences of the immigrant who left twenty-five years ago.

Were I to rebuild, out of many life stories and recollections, an account of the daily life of the average immigrant from one of these small *mestizo* towns, it might have many faults of detail. Someone could always say, "Why, they didn't do things like this in *my* town!" or "She must have talked to some of those *norteños*.¹ This doesn't sound like Guanajuato." Details of life must vary widely throughout Mexico, if Descanso's collection of immigrants from seven states is an example. The variation, however, is likely to involve such matters as the proper size for a festival *tamale*, or a particular technique for cloistering one's daughters. The larger outlines of life are amazingly similar, from region to region, the details being illustrative only of individual local approaches. The fierce regionalism, often leading to colony antagonisms, which was typical of the south Italian, is lacking in a Mexican colony. A mild joke about a Chihuahua accent or Sonoran slowness is as far as regionalism goes. Nostalgic as the older Mexican often is about "*mi tierra*,"² his own locale in Mexico, he is above all a Mexican, a member of *la raza*,³ bound by group ties which override provincialism.

¹ *norteño*: a northerner, from a state like Chihuahua or Sonora.

² *mi tierra*: literally, my land, but applied to a locality rather than to the nation at large. *Mi patria*, "my country," signifies Mexico as a whole.

³ *la raza*: literally, the race, used by Mexicans in the United States to apply to all persons of Mexican descent.

The Youth of Juan Pérez

Juan Pérez is, of course, an abstraction; no one exactly like him exists, but many people very similar to him do. His story is a composite of life histories and reminiscences of those who spent their youth in Mexico and their adult lives in the United States. No attempt has been made to present his life in daily detail; while it could be done, it would make a book in itself, and one whose perusal would be of more interest to the sociologist or anthropologist than to the general reader. This brief story only tries to suggest how he was conditioned in childhood, the ideals and sanctions of the society which surrounded him, the techniques he was taught for launching himself in adult life. These things constituted his cultural heritage, the extra baggage which he brought with him to the United States.

Juan Pérez was born in Celaya in 1894, in a *barrio* called Los Conejos. There had his father been born, and his mother, too. The family home was a three-room adobe, with a flat tile roof, dirt floors, and slits in the adobe work for windows. It had a small yard, carefully walled off from the street, ornamented with flowering plants set in old jars and dishes and swept daily. In back were the storehouses, the hen houses, and, when the family was prosperous, a pig in the stockade. The *barrio* had fifty or sixty such houses, two *tienditas*,⁴ and a small chapel. Almost all the families in the *barrio* had lived there for a generation or two; some of them were laborers at *haciendas* five to ten miles outside Celaya, many owned and worked tiny tracts outside the town, others were woodcutters or muleteers. A few were artisans. It was a poor district, but it had its own life, ambitions, and standards.

Juan was his mother's fourth child; she was assisted as usual by neighbors, one of whom had a reputation as a *partera*, or midwife. She was delighted with another baby—children were welcomed and loved in the *barrio*—but she was glad to be free of some of the troublesome restrictions of pregnancy. For nine months she had not been able to touch or dress an open cut or to handle fresh meat, for the touch of a pregnant woman on

⁴ *tienditas*: very small grocery stores.

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blood was supposed to be poisonous. She had to avoid standing pools of water, particularly at night, because of the evil spirits lurking in them, and she had worried over her cravings for certain foods which were unobtainable, but whose lack might cause a miscarriage. One ordeal remained, *la dieta*,⁵ the forty days following parturition during which women with any pretense to status remained strictly within their own homes. And she had to be careful not to eat onions or citrus fruit while she was nursing Juan, although she would begin early to supplement his diet with bits of *tortilla*, *atoles*,⁶ and even fruit.

The Sunday following the fortieth day of Juan's life was an important one. His mother took him to Mass—this was *la presentación*.⁷ He had received a lay baptism shortly after birth, but now he had the official—and expensive—church ceremony. His godparents, who had been selected with great care, vowed to give him material as well as spiritual care. They were important, these godparents. If his father and mother died, they would rear him; in many other crises of life, they would be at hand with gifts, advice, and aid. If they failed to do so, they would lose face with the entire *barrio*, for no obligation was taken more seriously. Juan would always have a second set of parents, an extra complement of relatives; no child stood alone in his society. He was given the name of the saint of that day, John, although his family had already begun calling him *El Rincón*,⁸ because of his shy way of burrowing into his mother's shoulder. That afternoon, half the *barrio* celebrated the christening with a party at the Pérez home. This expenditure, added to the baptismal fee, was to put a crimp in the Pérez finances for some time, but one had to do it if one possibly could. Only *cualquieras*⁹ evaded these obligations.

Before Juan could speak or scarcely understand, he was aware

⁵ *la dieta*: literally, the diet, but referring to the length of time the newly delivered woman remains within doors, whether or not her diet is restricted.

⁶ *atoles*: gruel.

⁷ *la presentación*: the presentation, to the Church and to the public, of an infant.

⁸ *el Rincón*: the corner, literally; it is a common nickname for a shy child, one who hides in a corner.

⁹ *cualquieras*: persons of no account.

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that there was another galaxy of persons, almost like relatives, who stood ready to aid him. He would hear his father, gesturing toward the ceiling, refer to *El Patron Arriba* as though the Deity hovered somewhere immediately above the roof tile. He was aware of his mother's close, personal relationship with the Virgin; she conversed with Her, while doing household tasks, almost as if She had been another woman sitting by the hearth. There were his own saint, and those of his brothers and sisters, and those of the *barrio*, the city, and the region. They were all human, intimately known, even to be seen occasionally by those of sufficient faith. They understood everything, fears, sins, disappointments, meannesses, hopes, and triumphs, and one could talk things over with Them—far more easily than with the priests, with their perpetual demands for money. In fact, it was often more comfortable to divorce Them in one's mind from Their representative on earth; deep religious feeling was not incompatible with considerable antagonism toward the Church. Many a time, Juan heard his father say, angrily, "All priests are wolves!" Juan was not to lose this sense of having heavenly intimates, supernatural friends who were always at hand, until after he came to the United States. It may be that the loss was great, but he does not admit it now. Those were things of yesterday.

Juan had colic throughout the first two years of his life. Neither his mother's milk nor the adult tidbits, including green fruit, with which it was supplemented, seemed to agree with him. The *curandera*¹⁰ was constantly in consultation with his mother. First they thought it might be *el daño*, a sickness caused by a glance from someone who had an evil eye; it might be the strange woman in the market who had smiled at the baby in his mother's arms. His mother broke an egg on a plate and left it overnight. In the morning, the white and the yolk had separated—yes, that meant it had been the woman. Someone found out where she lived, someone else managed to secure a cloth which she had used but had not washed. Little Juan was rubbed with it, while the confiteor was recited over him, and by morning he could hold food on his stomach again! But later his complaint was thought

¹⁰ *curandera*: a woman skilled in the folk remedies for disease.

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to be *el empacho*,¹¹ just plain overstuffing himself. For this the *curandera's* remedies were different—we would say more rational. She gave him a herbal cathartic and massaged his small stomach with a warm herbal effusion. These herbal remedies seemed to be effective, too, when he had sore eyes, when he had a rash, and when his foot was infected from a stone bruise. They did not always work, however; three out of Mrs. Pérez's nine children died in infancy, but Juan, by the time he was five, was as healthy and lively as the goats he helped to herd.

Juan's father had title to about two hectares of land about four and a half acres outside Celaya; his uncles had some adjoining pieces. With agricultural methods hardly improved since the Conquest, they wrested a subsistence crop of corn, beans, peppers, squash, and other vegetables from the land. By pasturing a few goats, they had milk for cheese and an occasional kid to barbecue. But it was always necessary to supplement the products of the two hectares with some cash money. Juan's father was proud of the fact that he "never worked for anybody, just for myself," meaning that he was not in peonage to a mine or *hacienda* owner, but he had some close calls. He hired out as muleteer on the road to Irapuato one dry season, and cut wood in the mountains during another. One year he made a lucky sale of surplus chiles, another he got several bags of beans for helping a neighbor build a house. He would have liked to accumulate sufficient capital to work as an *arriero* or even a *viajero* part of the time, but it never seemed to come his way.

Juan cannot remember when he could not hear the sound of his mother's *metate*, or grinding-stone. There was a gristmill in Celaya, but it was too expensive; besides, women of his mother's class took pride in being able to grind their own corn clean and fine. Between times, she was at the mortar and pestle, grinding chile, or at the public washing fountain, rubbing clothing clean on the stones. In her spare time, her strong, quick hands would turn in the patting circular motion necessary to produce a thin, perfectly round, *tortilla*. Before fiestas or celebrations, the sounds of grinding, patting, and chopping rose to a crescendo in Juan's

¹¹ *el empacho*: the surfeit, apparently indigestion.

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barrio; all the good festival recipes, like those for *moles*¹² or *tamales*, required hours of reducing ingredients to a paste.

Juan's mother sewed, too. All the men's work clothes, *calzones*,¹³ *camisas*,¹⁴ and *blusas*,¹⁵ were made at home from white cotton yardage bought in the market, as were Mrs. Pérez's full, swinging skirts (*enaguas*) and blouses. Juan's father, who had worked for a shoemaker in his youth, could do a creditable job making and repairing leather sandals. Of course, no one wore them much, except in very cold weather, for work on rough ground, or for travel to a distance.

From the time Juan was two until he was five, he was in the care of his older sister, for by this time his mother had another baby to nurse. It was from this sister that he first heard the folklore of his region. There was the woman in his *barrio* who was supposed to be a *bruja* (witch), able to change herself to an animal at will; she had bathed in a secret lake in a mountain cave and then rolled in an ant hill to gain this power. His sister pointed out the curiously shaped hill which looked like a sitting figure. That, she said, was all that was left of a bad little boy who refused to stand when his elders spoke to him! Juan soon learned that implicit obedience and instant respect to his elders was part of his role in life; he learned it so early that he cannot remember how he was taught. True, there were occasional stinging slaps and sharp words—and he knew that serious misbehavior could bring a severe beating—but he had no sense of being under heavy-handed authority. For the most part, he was loved, played with, and petted. Why did he obey? "I never thought of doing otherwise," he said. "No child did." He is puzzled and saddened today because his own children do not give him the same unquestioning respect and co-operation.

He was expected to make himself useful early. There were tasks, like husking nuts and peeling seed-pods, which baby hands could do, and errands which small feet could run. When he was five, he was taken into the men's world for his apprenticeship in

¹² *mole*: a highly spiced sauce, served with pieces of boiled meat.

¹³ *calzones*: loose, white cotton trousers.

¹⁴ *camisas*: shirts.

¹⁵ *blusas*: blouses, buttonless, worn with the lower ends tied together at the front.

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life. After all, it was not uncommon in his *barrio* for boys to marry at fourteen or fifteen, and ten years was none too long a time in which to learn the techniques of a householder. He helped his cousin herd goats; he could care for stock by the time he was eight; and, when he was ten, he put in long days pushing seed corn into the ground with a pointed stick. During the dry season, he spent interminable, wriggling hours learning to recite his *doctrinas*, his catechism, by rote, so that he could be properly confirmed. One year, he and his cousin even went for a few hours a week to the house of a woman who could read and write; they learned the alphabet, the general shape and form of about twenty-five simple words, and how to scrawl Pedro and Juan, their names, laboriously. This was the only schooling he ever had.

Juan loved his mother devotedly—she lives in his home in Descanso today, and he addresses her as *madrecita*¹⁶ in the tone of a small boy; he was close to the sister who had been his foster-mother, and he admired the fat baby Concha, but he soon learned that men's and women's worlds lay far apart. Men were leaders, women followers, and one's own women must be protected from other men. It was his job to see that his sisters never left the yard without an escort; he trotted dutifully beside them on the streets or in the fields, conscious that they were never to be left alone a moment. Boys and girls, after babyhood, did not play much together, although they encountered one another thousands of times in the course of work or *barrio* celebrations. When boys began hanging around the gate, attracted by his pretty sister Blanca, it was Juan's job to see that they got no farther. Finally, after much family consultation, the most promising of them, Socorro Vargas, was permitted to come to the door or window and talk to Blanca, under the supervision of the entire household; he did not cross the threshold, however, until he came with an older friend to ask for Blanca's hand in marriage. As it turned out, Blanca and Socorro lived together for some time without a church marriage, in fact, until after their second child was born. There had been some bad years; money was scarce and a priest's fees high. No one thought the less of

¹⁶ *madrecita*: little mother, an affectionate diminutive.

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them for this; there were many such unions, referred to in later years as *casamientos del tiempo de Porfirio*.¹⁷ The important thing was that community custom and sanctions had been satisfied. Everyone knew that Blanca had conducted her courtship properly and that she had been virgin at marriage—the old women who made these things their business had examined the nuptial sheets and announced the happy fact to the *barrio*.

If girls were to be protected, young men were to have their experience as soon as possible. Very often, their fathers would supervise the arrangements. One day, he saw his uncle stop to greet a widow of the *barrio* on the street; as Juan passed by, he heard the uncle say, "It's all right. It's time." Soon thereafter, Juan was aware, his cousin had his first sexual experience. There were always a few women in each *barrio* who, while outwardly respectable and even devout, were known to be open to advances—deserted wives, widows, or girls without adequate protection. They were not outcasts; they were tolerated, even by other women, whose comment was likely to be a shrug and a caustic, "En puerta abierta hasta un ángel peca."¹⁸ Juan had his own experiences, not unlike his cousin's: they apparently moved him neither toward guilt nor toward sentiment. At fourteen, he had witnessed death, birth, and probably procreation, in a three-room house where numerous persons of assorted ages and sexes slept on *petates*¹⁹ on the floor. His parents were not careless—they had given him training in modesty of speech and action—but the accidents of crowded living made it inevitable that he should see more than they intended.

By the time Juan was seventeen, he was ready to marry. In spite of the confusion and want the civil war had brought, the Pérez family was not doing badly. They had not starved and they still had their land. True, Juan's hotheaded older brother had joined the rebel forces and been killed; and Blanca's husband, always eager for money, had gone to work in a mine, where he

¹⁷ *casamiento del tiempo de Porfirio*: marriage in the time of Porfirio Díaz, when there was no legal substitute for the comparatively expensive church marriage.

¹⁸ "En puerta abierta hasta un ángel peca": "If the door is open, even an angel sins."

¹⁹ *petates*: plaited mats, used as beds.

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had been crippled in an accident. But Juan felt that he was equal to these family problems; he could do every sort of man's work, from shoeing mules to harvesting crops; he had even spent two seasons with his uncle, the *arriero*, on the road, so he knew the world. His help was badly needed on the family plots; with his share from them, plus what he could earn by outside work during the dry season, he could maintain a family of his own. He asked his uncle to act as *señor grande*²⁰ for him with the family of Lola Ramos.

His family had not approved of his interest in Lola. Her father was one of those who "worked for someone else," as a laborer on a *hacienda* about five miles from town, although he maintained his family in a poor house in the *barrio*. That, however, was not so important as the fact that Lola's mother had once been involved in a scandal. Even Juan's mother had to admit, however, that Lola seemed to be virtuous and hard-working; Juan assured them that Lola had been properly careful during his courtship, that she had never seen him alone, and that she had demurred the customary five or six times before accepting his proposal.

That evening, the uncle and Juan dressed up and went to the Ramos house. Juan waited outside, but he knew what was happening in the house. Everyone but Lola's father would leave the room immediately. The uncle would then say, "I come on a matter of business." The father would pretend he did not know what the business was; the uncle would explain. If the father consented, he would call in the mother and she would set the date. Everything went well, except that Lola's family committed one breach of etiquette; they set the date too soon, just a month ahead. Juan's mother said that anyone could see that Ramos family was anxious to marry off its girls; a family mindful of the proprieties would have set a date six months ahead, no matter how pleased they were with the match.

Like Blanca and Socorro, Lola and Juan went to live together without benefit of a church ceremony. There had not been a priest in Celaya for several months now; no one knew when he would return. And if he had, the combined families could not

²⁰ *señor grande*: an important man, in this case applied to an older friend or relative of the suitor.

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have scraped together money for the fee; the burial of Juan's grandmother and the baptism of Blanca's child a year ago had exhausted their funds. This did not mean that the new home did not have community sanction. The Ramos family gave a fiesta, poor enough, but sufficient in its way. All the godparents and relatives brought gifts of household goods; Juan gave his bride some simple *donas*; ²¹ the parents-in-law pledged one another as *consuegros*, ²² promising mutual friendship and aid in making the new household a success. That night, Juan took Lola to the abandoned house, which he had repaired, of his dead brother.

That season was the hardest the *barrio* of Los Conejos had ever known. There was too much rain, and half of the seed corn spoiled in the ground. Juan's uncle, the *arriero*, was robbed and half killed by drunken soldiers. Another band of soldiers drove off the goats, every one of them, and slaughtered them for meat. The Pérez family was saved by the fact that Juan had gone into business with a *viajero*; they had made some money buying corn in another district and reselling it in Celaya, but the trips were dangerous. Juan felt himself losing heart in spite of his comparative success. He thought of his father's life, so hard, so subject to accident and whims of fate—why, a man could work like a burro and then see it all swept away some day. His cousin, who was now working for a railroad in Texas, earned as much as two dollars a day, people said. The man he had talked to in Irapuato said you could get more, if you were hard-working. Juan was sure he was hard-working. Quite suddenly, without consulting anyone, he sold one or two blankets and some blacksmith tools. That night, he walked slowly with Lola, who was pregnant, over to his mother's house; when they were inside, he made his announcement: "*Me voy lejos—a los Estados Unidos.*" ²³ When the weeping and astonishment had subsided, he outlined the arrangements he had made. Lola would stay with his mother until after the baby was born; by that time, he would have money to send for her

²¹ *donas*: gifts which the groom gives to the bride; in classes somewhat higher than Juan Pérez's, they include her trousseau.

²² *consuegros*: parents-in-law with respect to the parent of his son or daughter-in-law.

²³ "*Me voy lejos—a los Estados Unidos*": "I'm going far off—to the United States."

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and, perhaps, for any of the others who wanted to come. The younger brother, now fifteen, could take his place on the family plots; with the help of the now retired *arriero*, there would be enough men. He could get a place on a mule team going to Irapuato; from there he would take the train.

When they were returning from his mother's, Lola wept again. Was it right, she asked, that a man should just leave when he wanted to? "Yes," said Juan firmly. She knew as well as he did that it was the man who was the head of the house, who made the decisions and took the risks. On matters of the heart, those connected with the welfare of children or relatives, husband and wife consulted together; but, on matters of business, the husband stood alone.

Two weeks later, when Juan, just eighteen, climbed over the little hill at El Paso, heard the shouts of the labor *coyotes*, and felt the impact of an alien and indifferent world strike him, he wondered whether he had decided right. Never in his life had he been so alone or felt so helpless, but it was too late to turn back. He shrugged and quoted a *refrán*²⁴ to the man nearest him. "When one is blind in the house of a money changer, who does the counting?" "*Aie!*" said his neighbor, who appreciated an apt turn of speech, "this is like being in the house of the soapmaker. He who does not fall, slips."

The Remodeling Process

As Juan Pérez started up the back streets of El Paso, in company with the gang of railroad workers with whom he had signed, the forces of his new environment began to operate. He was unaware of them, except that he felt uneasy and helpless, certain that the old traditions and habits would be of little aid here, but ignorant of what lay before him and what he could do about it. It is interesting to speculate on how the absorption of our immigrant groups might have been different, had they been officially oriented into the ways of life in the United States. What if those who could read had been handed little booklets, printed

²⁴ *refrán*: a saw or proverb.

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in their own languages, similar to those used by American armed forces abroad—"How to Act in the United States" or "The Customs and Habits of the North Americans" or "The Immigrant Handbook"? What if those who could not read had been held in immigration centers while they received careful instruction on the laws, currency, social habits, taboos, and idiosyncrasies of the society in which they were to make their home, along with enough language instruction to give them command of useful, simple phrases? What if there had existed some official agency called, perhaps, the Commission for Immigrant Affairs, to which they could go for advice, protection, and guidance?

Even with these safeguards, transition would have been painful enough, but it might not have been so flagrantly wasteful of human emotions and talents. The result might have been a more harmonious whole than exists today. Needless to say, Juan Pérez received no such attention, any more than Pietro Gigli or Hjalmar Hjalmarsson had—America was a place where they were darned lucky to be, ran the popular thought, and if they couldn't learn to act like other folks, it just proved they were dumb. With the whole previous pattern of his life shattered by the act of crossing the border, Juan Pérez set about piecing together bits of the new. In the bunk house at night, he and his companions shared scraps and tags of information, many of them incorrect, many of them set in the wrong contexts, but a few, by sheer luck, right. It was a great deal like working a jig-saw puzzle when you don't know what the picture is supposed to be, and you are sure that several of the important pieces are missing. It cannot be said of Juan Pérez that, in his late forties, after twenty-eight years of living here, he has ever succeeded in getting the whole puzzle together. But in certain sections of it he has done well.

There was one thing which impressed Juan and his *compadres* as they talked in bunk houses, around picking fires, or in the cheap cafés of El Paso's poor districts. The life they had led before was valueless to them here. No American was interested in it; no one considered it anything but "low" or "savage" or "funny"; manifestations of another culture were likely to be met with reactions ranging from aversion to ridicule to incarceration. Juan had not enjoyed high status in his own country; he had

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known both exploitation and injustice; but he had been able to feel a certain sureness in his way of life. The little pattern of Los Conejos was part of the big pattern of Mexico; it had its place, its validity, and its worth. But in the United States it had no worth; he began to feel powerful pressures on him to make him into something he was not prepared to be, a person he hardly understood—the man who was “just like everybody else.” He could refuse, he could hang back, or he could fail. The penalties would not be obvious. He would not be sent to prison or deprived, openly, of his few possessions. He would just be pushed into a half-world, a place reserved for the “foreigner” and the half-assimilated, where advantage, opportunity, and recognition were sharply limited. He would be hung between his old world and the new, with no place except among other dwellers in the half-world.

Juan Pérez had lived under a dictatorship; he was familiar with force and coercion. If Porfirio Díaz had decided that the *barrio* of Los Conejos was to contribute 50 per cent of its income to the building of a new Palacio Municipal or that its adult males should go off to forced labor in the tropics, his *rurales* probably could have accomplished both objects very summarily. Four hundred years ago, the Spaniards had checked a civilization in mid-career and forcibly imposed European institutions upon it. Folk memories of that event are implicit in the way Juan Pérez draws back his lips when he says “*Gachupin!*”²⁵ Conformity induced by violence was an historical fact in his country, but the United States was different. It was the land of the free—even the residents of Los Conejos knew that. Why, then, did he feel under constraint and compulsion—under disapproval?

There are no signs in Descanso which say “The State has a penalty for speaking broken English” or “By decree, preferential hiring will be given to native sons” or “By civic ordinance, all persons of Mexican descent, with certain exceptions, will be housed west of the railroad tracks.” Descanso’s best instincts would be outraged by such tactics. Committees of protest would be formed. The law would be evaded in a thousand ingenious

²⁵ *Gachupin*: a spur-wearer; a Spaniard.

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ways. The person of Mexican descent would find himself the focal point of warm and agitated sympathy. There would be some angry talk about trying to regiment people. What if a law read, "All persons of Mexican origin, after five years' residence in the United States, shall cease to display, in action or manner, recognizable signs of their former culture, under penalty of forfeiting access to equal employment opportunity, use of public recreation, service in restaurants or hotels, and rental or purchase of property in prescribed areas"? A tornado of protest would engulf the unfortunate administration that had engineered such a law; cries of "bureaucracy" and "dictatorship" would rend the air. It would be said—with justice—that every phrase of the offending legislation was an insult to the spirit and letter of our Constitution.

But Descanso, having accomplished practically the same ends by indirection, considers its methods, not regimentation, but "common sense." Its practices toward its Mexican group actually constitute a large unwritten body of law. This law, in effect, says: "Those of different culture and/or race, particularly if they lack economic power, are to be treated by standards inferior to those prevailing for residents of the United States at large." In carrying out the unwritten law, Descanso found it necessary to abridge a constitutional amendment, certain sections of the civil code of the state, as well as a civic ordinance or two of its own. The unwritten law, or any intimations of it, never stood a chance of getting on a statute book. Public opinion would not have stood for seeing it in black and white, for Descanso's assertion that it wants to be fair is not an idle one. If the cards had been laid on the table, in the form of crystallization of practice into law, Descanso would have been sickened by the sight of the marked deck it was dealing. This was one folkway it could not have stood seeing embodied in a stateway.²⁶ If, however, Descanso

²⁶ The concept of folkways, a body of custom, as against stateways, or legislation, was that of the sociologist, William Graham Sumner. "Legislation, however, has to seek standing ground on the existing mores, and it soon becomes apparent that legislation, to be strong, must be consistent with the mores." William Graham Sumner, *Folkways*, Ginn, 1906, p. 55. The laissez-faire and fatalistic nature of many of Sumner's doctrines has been pointed out by Myrdal and others. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, Harper, 1944, pp. 1035-1064.

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could claim that the unwritten law did not exist, or if it could rationalize its practices on the ground that the group concerned was "low" or "different" or "inferior," a bad conscience was thereby eased. Juan Pérez, however, felt the impact of the unwritten law every day of his life; the price of not being "just like everybody else" was underprivilege, often inequality before the existing law. That is why he did not feel as free as he had expected to, north of the border; he was puzzled by the presence of a force he could not understand, one not so simply explained as Don Porfirio and the *rurales*. In a thousand ways, at countless points, this force determined the nature and quality of his assimilation into American life. Combined with the cultural luggage he had brought with him, it produced the results which can be observed in Descanso's *colonia* today.

CHAPTER V

AFTER TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS

They Keep Their Foreign Ways

WHEN Descanso is trying hard to disclaim any hint of racial antagonism toward its Mexican-Americans and to build up as good a case as possible for its own tolerance and generosity, it falls back on the old theme of assimilation. The Mexicans just won't assimilate, that's the trouble. They stick together and won't make outside friendships. The old people won't learn English and the young ones won't speak it, half the time. "Can you tell me," said one exasperated church leader, "why anyone born and brought up in this country should speak with a foreign accent? I've just been to a young people's conference and the Mexican kids there all had an accent you could cut with a knife." A school counselor was genuinely troubled: "You know that I feel that the less segregation the better, but the Mexican children at school insist on having their own club. They don't seem to want to go in with the others." A city official said, "Don't talk to me about segregated housing. They like to live with their own kind. They all moved in there together in the first place and they want to stay together. They've got their own ways of doing things and they want to keep them."

As the newer concept of culture as a way of living spreads among Descanso's better educated persons, a whole train of assorted ideas is growing up in its wake. One can hear a great deal about cultural conflict and inter-cultural problems or, occasionally, inter-cultural harmony. The concept embodied in these phrases is that the less privileged position of the Mexican-American is due to our lack of understanding of his ways of life and, in equal or greater part, to his failure to learn our ways. Certainly, this attitude is far sounder, greatly more progressive,

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than that arising out of uninformed class or race prejudice. Properly defined, thoroughly understood, and applied with imagination and courage, it has enormous potentialities. Particularly in the fields of elementary and secondary education, it points the way toward rearing a generation of young citizens able to work and live harmoniously together, regardless of their backgrounds. Its great present defect is that, like other fads and fashions in thought, it is partially or mistakenly comprehended, confused with other issues, and applied, like a plaster, to a great assortment of situations. "Inter-cultural" has a tendency to fall from the lips of those in certain circles with the same superficial glibness that "inferiority complex" once did. Often, the begging of cultural differences serves as an escape from the facing of affairs which are political or legal in nature. To say that a minority cannot expect equal treatment before the law until inter-cultural understanding has been achieved is to wrest a simple matter of civil rights out of its entire context. It constitutes a delaying action.

To use the retarded acculturation, fancied or real, of a group as a pretext for denying it opportunity is not very different from using the concept of racial inferiority for the same purpose. Inter-cultural harmony, construed in any honest sense, should involve the constant effort to open up new avenues for participation. Learning another culture is like learning another language—the more opportunities for practice the better.

Too many people, even in Descanso's better-informed circles, are inclined to think of "culture" as something as rigidly defined, as unchangeable, and as inheritable as the color of one's skin or the shape of one's nose. "They are born that way" is a comment too frequently heard on the lips of those who claim to speak in "cultural" terms. "The Mexican is just born with a slower tempo for life," said one otherwise intelligent woman, "and I don't think it's fair for our educational system to make the same demands on him." "Don't you think," said another serious and sympathetic teacher, "that the Mexican is born with a flair for getting a great deal out of the small things of life, but lacks the vision and foresight for the larger?" "I've taught two generations of Mexicans," said an elderly woman, "and while I've come to

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know and like them, I can see the same inborn temperament in the children as I did in their fathers." What these women are trying to voice, of course, is the fact that, out of group experience, certain group personality traits have arisen. If they could analyze their own culture—an admittedly difficult thing to do—they would notice analogous group personality traits among Anglo-American children. Trained educators have long since ceased to consider American group traits inborn. In dealing with a minority, however, folklore has a tendency to triumph over formal education.

The idea that a culture exists like a granite monument, once hewn henceforth immutable throughout decades, is a curious idea for anyone living in the United States to entertain. There are some cultures which are almost static, but they are few in the world, and ours is not among them. Communication and migration have been mixing up cultural elements, and technology has been hastening change everywhere, but nowhere more than in North America. Grandma H—, the oldest living resident of Descanso, can hardly believe her ninety-four-year-old eyes as she looks around her. It isn't just the mechanical world of cars, airplanes, and streamliners which gives her pause; it is the tremendous change in manners, morals, and values. The frontier settlement in which she grew up was actually much more like Los Conejos de Celaya, in which Grandmother Pérez grew up, than like modern Descanso. Neither grandmother entirely approves of this new world, but neither realizes how much she herself has changed—Grandma H— as she talks long-distance to a great-grandson in New York, or Grandmother Pérez as she briskly plugs in the *máquina para lavar*.¹

Juan Pérez, it has been pointed out, made a jump of seventy years or so when he moved from Los Conejos to El Paso. He cast himself from a small, traditional, agricultural society straight into a large, rapidly changing industrial world. He has lived in this new world twenty-eight years. Is he the same person he was when he arrived? If so, he would be a distinct rarity among human beings, most of whom are far more imitative than mon-

¹ *máquina para lavar*: washing machine.

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keys and infinitely more adaptable. Has he changed greatly in some ways and less in others? That would be logical to suppose, because both incentives and pressures to change have been unequal in various areas of his life. Some things may even have conspired to hold him back from change. And finally, where do the great differences lie between his way of life and that of the Anglo-Americans with whom he shares a community and an economy? If inter-cultural abysses exist, it might be just as well to map them. It is always possible that some of them could be shadows cast by our own cultural point of view.

When Descanso talks about inter-cultural harmony, it still means harmony in which it carries the dominant part. We can appreciate other ways of life, it feels, but only as a preliminary to converting their owners to our ways, down to the last detail of speech and mannerism. It is true that we seem to feel surer of ourselves as community and national entities when everyone is "just like everyone else." This may not be the best approach—other nations, notably the Soviet Union, have apparently succeeded in letting minority groups retain their cultural autonomy while providing them avenues for participation in national life.² A great deal of creative and valuable material which would lend luster and variety to our national life, may be lost in the process of reducing everyone to a common cultural denominator. The Hispanic culture of the state of New Mexico is a case in point. More important, groups of people who are not "just like everyone else," if they were allowed to exist free of social pressure to conform, could provide us with valuable training schools for getting along with the nations and cultures of the world. But the day when we will be anything but uneasy and uncomfortable in the face of "foreign ways" on the part of members of our body politic is still far in the future. Conformity is our present object, for better or worse. Certainly to approach it via paths of understanding and appreciation of the other cultures is far more intelligent, and potentially fruitful of harmonious results, than to let ridicule, suspicion, and ignorance be our tools.

The fact remains that we are not the best judges of what con-

² Owen Lattimore, "New Road to Asia," *The National Geographic Magazine*, Vol. LXXXVI, No. 6 (December, 1944), pp. 641-676.

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stitutes cultural difference. Molehills are very likely to be blown up to mountain-size, in the minds of people to whom accented English is a proof that "those people won't assimilate." Perhaps it is because we are such poor linguists ourselves that we become so incensed at the sound of a foreign tongue. A Mexican consulate member told of being on a streetcar, conducting a conversation in Spanish with a countryman, when an American workingman suddenly turned on them and fairly shouted, "Why don't you talk American?" Señor S— said that he was surprised, not so much at the comment, but at the heat and anger which accompanied it. "By the look of that man's face," he said, "you would have thought that my friend and I had just accomplished a public obscenity."

The use of Spanish in public ranked foremost, far above all other reasons given by Anglo-Americans as a cause of friction and ill-feeling between the two populations. "You go to Woolworth's after school," said a housewife, "and you might as well be in a foreign country. All those little girls chattering Spanish, when you know they've been educated in our public schools." "Most of our playground fights," said a junior high school principal, "between the two groups start because Mexican boys were speaking Spanish in a mixed group. The others, because they don't understand, are sure they're being insulted." "We ought to have a law," said a parent-teacher functionary, "that not a word of Spanish could be spoken on school property. This way, the teachers can be insulted without ever knowing it!" Certainly, many Mexican-Americans could exercise greater tact and courtesy regarding the use of Spanish in situations where Anglo-Americans might feel excluded from side-eddies of conversation. With equal certainty, they could bring social pressures to bear on those bad little boys of their own group who persist in muttering foul language in the presence of Anglo-American teachers who cannot understand them. "What does *chingar* mean?" said a high school counselor. "I feel it can't be very bad, they say it so often. *Chinga* the job, *chinga* the weather, and *chinga* the teacher." Not the worst of these boys would have the temerity to use the equivalent "bitching" (a rather euphemistic equivalent) once, much less constantly, in a school office, even though they represent the

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*malcriados*³ of the colony, held in little esteem by their own group.

Most public use of Spanish, however, represents neither discourtesy nor carelessness, but simply the natural desire of people to converse with one another in the language which is that of home, friendship, and intimacy. "You can say so many more things in Spanish," said a high school girl, "funny things, little jokes and turns of speech you've heard all your life, but which don't sound the same in English." "I feel different when I put these personal things about my home and my husband into English," said a Mexican-American housewife; "they sound flowery and insincere, in a way they don't in Spanish." "Yes, I'm bi-lingual," said a Mexican merchant, who speaks excellent English, with only the faintest accent, "but only in a sense. For business, yes, and for many other occasions. But when I want to relax, to be at ease to express myself fully, precisely, and with variety, I must do it in Spanish." I was reminded of a similar comment, made by a Mexican citizen of French extraction about his group's use of the French language, even after two or three generations of living in Mexico. "We use it to speak with our hearts." But in Guadalajara, Mexico, no one seemed to mind the sound of French in the air. Mothers were glad to have their children play in French homes, to pick up a pure accent early in life.

Although Descanso agrees that the principal reason it has for feeling that Juan Pérez just won't assimilate is his use of a foreign language, it has other charges to bring against him. None of them is so specific or as widely held as that relating to language, however. One might expect that food habits would raise a point of difference, but Descanso, on the whole, is an admirer of Mexican cuisine. "I can make a meal of chile and beans as well as the next Mex," says Bill Daley of the Santa Fe shops, "and lots of times the missus stops on Monticello Avenue to pick up a batch of *tortillas*." "Let's have some real Spanish food over on Monticello Avenue," is the rallying cry of many a hostess. Descanso's lower-priced cafés serve *chile con carne*, *tamale* pie, *frijoles*, *chile* and beans as often as they serve hash and fried eggs. Nor does distinctive dress serve to mark the Mexican-American.

³ *malcriados*: badly brought-up persons.

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For all the hullabaloo about "zoot suits," only a small proportion of Descanso's Mexican-American boys wear them; and it is a fad in which they are joined by Negroes and some Anglo-Americans of like socio-economic status. A very few elderly women wear the *rebosa*⁴ and long, full skirt, like an *enagua*. The bulk of Descanso's Mexican colony, like the bulk of Descanso's working people, obtain their clothing from Penney's, Sears, Roebuck, Montgomery Ward, the basement bargain counters, and the hole-in-the-wall Fashion Shoppe. If one feels that some little Mexican-American girls wear their pompadours too high, their sweaters too tight, their street clothes too vibrantly colored and too bedecked with cheap jewelry, a walk through Descanso's business section at the noon hour will convince one that they have plenty of Anglo-American company in these sartorial sins.

No, the charges which Descanso makes on the score of "foreign ways" are less specific and explicit. There is, for instance, the very common complaint that "Mexicans want to keep to themselves, they're clannish." Inasmuch as this remark often comes from a person who has previously said, "There's one thing about the Mexicans, they're not always pushing in where they're not wanted; they stay in their own part of town," it is rather difficult to disentangle cause from effect. Then there is the feeling that family life and morals among Mexicans are both different and "lower"—that the average Mexican workingman is a Don Juan and that his wife, in intervals between doing the family washing, cherishes the instincts of a Carmen. There are differences between the Latin-American and the Anglo-American pattern of family life, but the emphasis does not fall on "higher" or "lower" moral codes. Descanso, with its long history of organized prostitution, might well think twice before saying too much about sexual morality. The next charge is that Mexicans live "only for the day," that they lack the drive, energy, and foresight which distinguish the Anglo-American. Here again, it is difficult to separate cause and effect. The average Mexican in this country has had to live from day to day, or at least from pay-day to pay-day, in the strictest, most limiting sense; he has been poor and his

⁴ *rebosa*: a scarf-like head covering.

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incentives to seek higher status limited. Still, when one considers the fashion in which a group like the Japanese-Americans, facing more severe barriers, managed to pull itself upward in the economic scale, one is tempted to say that the Mexican-American has been somewhat passive and apathetic. Certainly, leaders among the Mexican-Americans recognize that the economic disadvantage—one could say degradation—of their group constitutes its greatest problem.

But this is hardly a cultural matter, except as exploitation, both here and in Mexico, may have developed certain attitudes of defeatism. Nor are the other allegations which Descanso makes regarding the Mexican—that he is childish, improvident, given to producing too many children and getting drunk too often—those of cultural difference. They are rather part and parcel of the stereotype which has been applied to all our immigrant groups, even those with Anglo-Saxon, North European cultural patterns. Descanso applies this stereotype today, in full detail, to its Okies and Arkies, who cannot by any stretch of the imagination be considered either immigrants or foreigners.

The truth of the matter is that Descanso does not know enough about the life of Juan Pérez, over on the other side of town, to make any judgments about cultural difference. What goes on in the homes around Monticello Avenue, what constitutes the daily routine of life, the standards, aspirations, and values, the personal relationships, the community judgments, is a closed book to Descanso. It has never troubled to find out. The one easily recognizable difference, that of language, strikes it forcibly; to the tail of that kite, it attaches a whole streamer of highly imaginative ideas about "foreign ways." Add to that some hit-or-miss conclusions, drawn chiefly from movies and popular fiction, about the Latin temperament; add the idea, sedulously fostered by the press, that every Mexican sooner or later gets drunk, pulls a knife, and lands in jail, and you have about summed up Descanso's ideas on cultural difference. Even those who have added to this equipment the reading of some books about Mexico, or travel in Mexico, are likely merely to impose the stereotype of the peon, the ignorant, superstitious fellow bent over a hoe, upon their other stereotypes.

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Juan Pérez has not been a peon for over a quarter of a century. His children have never been peons. They know almost as little about life in a place like Los Conejos as Descanso itself does. Juan Pérez himself has forgotten a great deal. For most of his adult life, he has lived in a world as far removed from Los Conejos, socially and economically, as is possible. The pressures of that world have operated on him, nudging him into a new habit pattern here, snipping off an old one there, molding, kneading, and remodeling his pattern of life. It is quite possible to say that if he were to return to Los Conejos today, he would find himself less adapted to life there than he is to that in the United States. The few traditional ways he retains are subject to constant impact from the world about him; they are changing, disappearing, or being transmuted. Many ways of life that constituted a true cultural difference fifteen years ago scarcely exist today; many others will have gone ten years hence.

The Process

Because Juan Pérez came to the United States to be a worker in an industrial society, it was logical that the first pressures to operate on him arose from the commercial aspects of this society. It is even possible to say that these pressures have been the most lasting and consistent in remodeling his life. The public education system has played its part in the lives of his children and hence, second hand, in his; but in too many places, at too many times, commercial interests themselves determined the amount and quality of that education. His ties to the Catholic Church tended, if anything, to reinforce him in traditional ways; his contacts with Protestant religions have been slight. Contacts with public agencies, including those dispensing relief, have been impersonal and intermittent. It was through the hiring agencies, the provisioning agencies, the labor contractors, and their camp followers—the insurance agents, the small loan companies, the house-to-house peddlers of cheap blankets and doubtful proprietary medicines, the advertisers of household gear at *abonos fáciles*,

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*para su conveniencia*⁵—that Juan Pérez and his family received their first face-to-face contacts with the new society. These are still the channels for a large part of their contacts.

The acculturation of a group may start in very simple ways. A new tool, a mere change of clothing, may set in force a whole train of changes which ripple out, until even values and ideals are touched and transmuted. A culture is like a spider web—it is all of one piece. Touch one strand of it, and the whole thing quivers. Tear out a section and the fabric sags; it has to be re-woven, and the new pattern will not be like the old. Juan Pérez and his *compadres* had torn great holes in the fabric of their lives by the mere act of uprooting themselves; every step they took in the new world tore greater ones. Their lives have been a continual process of re-weaving, with whatever materials lay at hand. As most of the new strands had to be picked up in the new world, it is not surprising that the fabric of their lives now exhibits more of the new than the old, or that its pattern is more like Descanso than Los Conejos.

When Juan Pérez first went to work on a section near Amarillo, Texas, he had to buy a pair of work shoes from the commissary. He threw away his worn leather sandals. By this slight act, he made a number of changes. He cast aside his skill as a maker and repairer of sandals; it was of no use to him now. He relinquished an old ambition to become a *zapatero*,⁶ with a shop of his own, or to have his son become one; it was obvious that such a career, in a country where shoes were made in factories and came in boxes with price tags on them, had little scope. He accustomed himself to the idea that many necessities, food as well as clothing, could not be obtained almost direct from the earth and its products, but instead, came from far off, with price tags on them. He had initiated himself into a system of credit and debt, via the commissary, in which his survival depended upon having money coming in. When the flow of pay checks stopped and jobs grew tight, then indeed he was helpless, in a fashion he had not been in Los Conejos, with the *milpas* behind him. Life in Los Conejos had been hard, but it had possessed a certain con-

⁵ *abonos fáciles, para su conveniencia*: easy payments, at your convenience.

⁶ *zapatero*: shoemaker; in Los Conejos, a maker of leather sandals.

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tinuity and security.⁷ It was his own place, "*mi tierra*," not only in the sense that his family had lived there for generations, but also because they drew their subsistence directly from its products.

When Lola Pérez came to the United States a year later, she left a very important piece of household equipment behind her, because it was too heavy to carry. It was her *metate*. With it she left a whole section of her woman's life—an essential function, and her pride in being able to perform it well. When she wants *tortillas* these days, she buys them ready-made from a store in the Mexican colony. If she wants to make an especially large or especially thin variety of her own, she will buy the *masa*, or dough, and complete their manufacture. Or she may do what is easier and cheaper—run into the street when the bakery wagon comes along and pick up a couple of loaves of packaged American bread. Whatever she does, she will have lost the feeling of being an indispensable, major factor in the manufacture of her family's staff of life. Her daughter Lolita never knelt, at five or six, at a tiny *metate* close to her mother's, learning women's skills, hearing her mother's voice flow on above the sound of the grinding imparting the traditional precepts learned from her mother. The *metate* tied generations of women together, secure in a common function, receptive to "grandmother wisdom." But Lolita, at six, was out darting through the traffic of Fifth Street, already unsure of her function in life and of her mother's ability to guide.

The Pérez family has gathered around itself, in the course of a quarter of a century, all of the material objects of our civilization that it can possibly afford—cars, beds with mattresses and springs, gas stoves, radios, washing machines. They will continue to gather as many as they can, because opportunities for the acquisition of this portion of our culture have always been open—in many cases forced upon them—through mediums of salesmanship and advertising. While public schools considered a Spanish-

⁷ Under the head of "advice to [Mexican] villagers," Stuart Chase says, "You have in your possession something precious; something which the Western world has lost and flounders miserably trying to retain. Hold to it. . . . You must not move until you can be shown, by the most specific and concrete examples, that industrialism and the machine can provide a safer, happier, more rewarding existence. No such examples now obtain anywhere on earth." Stuart Chase, *Mexico: a Study of Two Americas*, Macmillan, 1931.

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speaking visiting teacher, to act as a liaison between home and school, an unwarrantable concession to "foreigners," insurance companies, firms selling goods from door to door, and provisioning houses made every effort to reach the Pérez family. They had Spanish-speaking salesmen; they distributed handbills and listed prices in Spanish; they advertised in foreign-language newspapers and plugged their products over foreign-language programs. Although their goods were often shoddy and their financing thinly disguised robbery, these commercial houses were acculturative agents, more effective in their results, more consistent in their effort, than many a more dignified institution. They "got under and pushed," in Descanso's own language. It is due to them that the life of Juan Pérez is greatly changed, not only on its material side, but in the many indirect ways in which the non-material is transformed by the adoption of a new tool, a new gadget, a new process. The man who buys a proprietary medicine, for instance, is on the way to abandoning an interest in the evil eye, little spirits who lurk in water holes, or reversed recitations of the confiteor. The woman who buys canned goods, instead of laboriously preparing products for the family storehouse, has made some important revisions in her status.

No such push arose from social institutions. No salesmen appeared on Monticello Avenue to introduce the Pérez family to the laws of the nation; they had to learn those by trial and error. The radio took no time off from purgatives and furniture on easy payments to talk about the Constitution, history, and traditions of this country. No representative of the public schools made the round of Mexican colonies and picking camps, explaining the advantages of an American education and offering to make the first day of school as easy a transition as possible for both parent and child. It is interesting to speculate how the experience of our immigrant groups might have differed had we exercised as much ingenuity, patience, and effort in initiating them into the mores and the higher aspects of our culture as we have in inducing them to buy our commercial products. What would Americanization of this sort have meant? Probably something quite different than the results obtained by a few night school classes in

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a dingy hall, conducted by an overworked teacher ministering to pupils soggy with the fatigue of a day's labor.

If Juan Pérez, with his background of a society where young people were closely guarded from free contact with one another, had his qualms about co-education, did anyone ever try, with the tactful persistence of an insurance agent, to "sell" him the idea? Certainly not to an extent sufficient to dissuade him from attempting, today, to cloister his daughters in much the same fashion he would have in Los Conejos—an attempt which, combined with co-education and its atmosphere of dates and boy friends, results in outcomes ranging from the ridiculous to the tragic. If he uses patriarchal methods to enforce obedience from his sons, forgetting that he is no longer in a patriarchal society, where has he had an opportunity to observe other methods? How can he give sure parental guidance to his children, when he knows less about the world outside the *colonia* than they do? In Los Conejos, the word of the elders was seldom questioned, because it was obvious that they knew, that their wisdom was practical and workable. In Descanso, the second-generation child of six has seen his parents hesitant, fumbling, bewildered, and disorganized. How can Lola Pérez be expected to rear her children "the American way"—providing, indeed, that this way is the more desirable—when she has never had a chance to observe an American home on a friendly, intimate footing?

Because few attempts have ever been made to bridge the social isolation in which Juan Pérez and his group live, it is precisely in the sphere of family and social organization that his progress in learning new ways has been slow. He tries to keep the old ways, partly because they seem stable and comforting, but chiefly because he does not know any others. The extended family circle of godparents, *consuegros*, and relatives does not provide the mutual aid and comfort it did in Los Conejos; it fails to work in an urban society. But what would replace it? Cloistering of girls often leaves them exposed, through ignorance or rebellion, to real dangers; but Juan Pérez is afraid to relax the only safeguards he knows. Freedom for young males, natural and normal enough in Los Conejos, where they were already doing men's work and playing a man's part, is disorganizing in a society where both

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vocational and sexual maturity are supposed to be deferred. But if the society furnishes no approved outlets, what can Juan Pérez do? In these spheres, there are no ready signposts on the road to learning our ways, no tools and gadgets offered on easy payments, at one's convenience. It may be that cultural change always proceeds at a slower pace in these fields. Or it may be that Juan Pérez's one-sided initiation into a new pattern of life merely reflects a defect of our own society. We, too, have been accused of a preoccupation with inventing and acquiring material things, at the expense of developing strong social institutions, such as those connected with the family and religion.⁸

At least, Juan Pérez has a phrase to sum up his experience. He says, "Yes, in coming to the United States, I have gained much. But I have also lost much. I have exchanged the spiritual for the material." He reverts to his old figure of the money-changer: "I am like the man who went to the *cambiador*, but could not count. I do not precisely know what I got in return. I live better, I have more things, but I do not feel at home in the world."

The Result

Juan Pérez lives, today, in a four-room house of cheap construction in Descanso's *colonia*, on a street distinguished by lack of paving and adequate lighting. He has lived in the same house for fourteen years, first as a renter and later as a buyer. (His total investment represents a sum quite out of proportion to the value of the ramshackle structure and the narrow lot in which it is set.) The house and its equipment are twentieth century American items, poor and often out of repair, but different in no way from thousands of working-class homes. The only hint of Los Conejos which remains is the fencing of the house-site from the street and the massed containers of succulents and flowering plants around its doorstep. Even the house altar which distinguished the poorest home in Los Conejos has disappeared, although the Pérez family is nominally Catholic.

⁸ This gap between advancing technology and retarded social adjustments constitutes the much-discussed "cultural lag." See William F. Ogburn and Meyer F. Nimkoff, *Sociology*, Houghton Mifflin, 1940, pp. 886-893.

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The Pérez household rises early, to the sound of an alarm clock. Hours and meals are adjusted to Juan Pérez's shift as a laborer at the Santa Fe shops; its big whistle marks the tempo of family life. Juan earned during the war \$160 a month, more than he ever made in his life, but out of it he maintained a household of seven. When young David was sixteen, it was possible for him to finish his schooling on a continuation basis; he hopes to keep on working as a part-time helper in the roundhouse. Lolita, the oldest daughter, is married; Leo and Tom, the older sons, were both in the Navy and supporting their wives from allotments; Lupe, Linda, and Frank, the schoolchildren, are non-producers, as is Grandmother Pérez. But \$160 a month is comparative wealth, when one looks back on the depression, with its "security" budgets of \$48 a month and extra-gang work at not much more.

Mrs. Pérez cooks on a wood range, not because she prefers it, but because she cannot afford a gas stove. For the same reason, she uses an ice-box instead of an electric refrigerator. She does own a second hand washing machine, and she hopes that the combined mechanical abilities of the family succeed in keeping it running. Washing in a tub under the apricot tree may look picturesque to the chance visitor; but, in Lola Pérez's opinion, it is only a shade less backbreaking than washing in the public fountain at Los Conejos.

The wood stove has one advantage; its hot lids are ideal for cooking *tortillas*. Her husband thinks a *tortilla* sticks to his ribs better than all the baker's bread in the world. The children like *pan tostado*⁹ with jam, or sweet bakery breads for breakfast. When they can afford it, all the family like eggs scrambled with *chorizo*¹⁰ and hot chocolate frothed with a *molina*¹¹ brought from Los Conejos. Usually, however, they fill up the gaps with milk and *refritos*¹² warmed up from the night before. Grandmother Pérez, up betimes after the manner of the old, brings in some extra kindling from the yard. The little girls dress in the

⁹ *pan tostado*: toast.

¹⁰ *chorizo*: a spicy Mexican sausage.

¹¹ *molina*: a hand-mill for whipping chocolate.

¹² *refritos*: beans cooked to a mush, then fried.

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kitchen, the males in the cold sleeping rooms. The Pérez family is fortunate in having an inside toilet—over half the houses in the block have privies—but they have no bathroom or hot-water heater. Faces are washed and hair is smoothed at the kitchen sink.

Mrs. Pérez has been listening to the local Spanish hour, on the air from five-thirty to eight in the morning, while she works. Even better than the recordings of *ranchero* songs that remind her of Celaya, she likes the melting voice of Jorge Negrete singing the new songs like "*Bésame Mucho*" and "*El Corrido del Norte*." But when the children come in, they want to listen to swing or the Hollywood Reporter. The Pérez family does not take a daily paper, but they try to borrow or buy one in the course of the day. Linda likes the *Descanso Reporter*, because it carried the Ernie Pyle columns; she is making a scrapbook of them. The others prefer a Hearst paper from a near-by city, because of its big comic section. The local Spanish-language weekly runs a third poor choice—not enough "funnies." Lupe and Frank, and even David, would sell their little souls for additional comic books; they collect all they can possibly lay their hands on. Grandmother Pérez's stories about the witches and ghosts of Los Conejos get scant audience, in competition with Dick Tracy and Buck Rogers.

Lupe and Frank attend the "Mexican" elementary school, Linda the "Mexican" junior high, and David the senior high school. As soon as they are out of the house, Mrs. Pérez turns to the task of restoring order to the four small rooms in which seven people have lived, slept, and eaten for twelve hours. After that, there is the eternal washing and ironing. Grandmother Pérez is too old to do much work. On sunny days, she sits in a chair under the apricot tree or gossips with another ancient over the back fence. When her gnarled hands permit, she tats fine thread into intricate lace patterns. Mrs. Pérez herself does not leave the house much. When she is asked why she does not interest herself in some community activity like the P.T.A., she replies that the "Mexican" school has no P.T.A.'s—and, as for the Red Cross, wouldn't she look fine walking 'way across town and into that big building where those fashionably dressed American women are? The only women's activity the Catholic church has is La Santísima, the Altar Society, and that is practically the property

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of four or five women who live close to the church. Anyway, a Mexican woman's life is in her home; that is where she is supposed to be, not running the streets.

Mrs. Pérez still does a great deal of the family buying at the Santa Fe provisioning agency, although the family's thirteen-year-old debt to this company has finally been paid. She considers it good policy to be seen frequently at a store which is also a hiring agency. The remainder of her supplies she buys at a neighborhood Mexican grocery, where the prices, although lower than those of the provisioning agency, are still higher than those of the chain stores. A grocery list for Mrs. Pérez, were she to write one, would read somewhat like this: *mantequilla de cacahuates, caja de sal, papel sanitario, frijol nuevo (saco de 100 lbs.), chiles jalapeños, 3 botes de salsa de tomate, jabón (10 barras), 3 botes grandes de leche, cocido de res, pan, lechuga, cebollas, col.*¹³ The only unfamiliar items, for other Americans, on this list might be the red beans, the canned chiles, and larger purchases of onions and tomato sauce. While it is true that a great deal of Mrs. Pérez's old culture persists in her cuisine, her weekly grocery purchases indicate the distance she has traveled, gastronomically, since leaving Los Conejos. In the fact that she gets her groceries over a counter, in exchange for money or credit, rather than from the family storehouse, lies the greatest change.

Mrs. Pérez prides herself on the fact that her children come straight home from school. It might be more accurate to say that, like children elsewhere, they are supposed to come straight home from school. In the six blocks between home and school, they play tag down the dusty streets, shy rocks at various objects of interest, and explore the wash that runs on the west of the *colonia*. When they do get home, it is with the idea of going out immediately. Mrs. Pérez's part of town does not have a well-equipped recreation center or park. Yards are small and crowded against the alleys—the inevitable playground is the street. Afternoon recreation on the streets is innocuous enough, if somewhat

¹³ The grocery list, in English, would read: peanut butter, a box of salt, toilet paper, 100 pound sack of beans, fancy canned chiles, 3 cans of tomato sauce, 10 bars of soap, 3 large cans of milk, stewing beef, bread, lettuce, onions, and cabbage.

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limited and dull. Small children drag battered vehicles on strings and dig holes in the parkway. Bigger boys conduct ball games in spite of traffic and ambush, commando-fashion, among the trash bins of the alleys. Whereas Juan Pérez, at eleven, was sharing a round of tasks with his father, his son, Frank, scarcely sees his father until suppertime and has no real idea of how the family livelihood is earned. Like other children in our urban society, he alternates between schooling, where learning is divorced from action, and somewhat purposeless recreation. Lupe has household tasks, it is true, but it cannot be said that she feels herself an essential part of the home's functioning, as Mrs. Pérez did at her age.

Mr. Pérez, in the hours immediately after work, carries out a recreation pattern held over from Los Conejos. He likes to be with other men. He may stand on the corner of Monticello and Sixth, one of a group apparently idling against a building and watching traffic. He is not idle; he is gathering the day's news. There are the multifarious concerns of the *colonia* to be covered first—who is ill, who is having trouble with his wife, the details of the latest friction between the Catholic church and the Protestant settlement house, rumors about lay-offs at the shops, gossip about the colony leaders. Civic, national, and international affairs have their innings, too. The street-corner group constitutes Juan Pérez's newspaper; he is more likely to remember and be impressed by the versions of happenings he hears there than by anything he later obtains via radio and press. When did he first hear, for instance, about the flight of Mussolini? Why, a friend told him, and if the friend's version happened to be ornamented with highly imaginative details, those are the ones which will stick in Juan Pérez's mind. To the extent that Juan Pérez gives greater credence to the news he receives by word of mouth than to that gained through commercial channels of communication, he remains a folk-person. If the events are of striking importance, they may be embodied in a *corrido*,¹⁴ like "Los Japonésas,"¹⁵ sung in the *colonia's* pool halls the year after Pearl Harbor. *La*

¹⁴ *corrido*: a song composed about a current event.

¹⁵ *Los Japonésas*: the Japanese.

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plebe,¹⁶ the *colonia*'s leaders call Juan Pérez and his friends, and they admit that *la plebe* is best reached by conversation on a street corner, at the gate of a dwelling, or over a repair job on an old car.

The family dinner is eaten late, about seven o'clock as a rule. If various family members are working at different hours, there may be no "sit-down" meal at all. Dishes are kept warm on the stove from six o'clock on, and everyone eats at his convenience. Grandmother Pérez, for instance, may eat early and go, with another elderly woman, to vesper service at the Catholic church. She is the only one in the family who makes her religion a part of her daily life. For the rest, it is a Sunday affair, if that. Mrs. Pérez and the younger children go to Mass quite regularly, but Juan Pérez and David are extremely negligent. Frank shows signs of wanting to join them. Both Frank and David have attended swimming classes at the Y, and David belonged to a boys' club there. Mrs. Pérez has heard the priest say that such attendance makes Catholic boys lose their religion, but she hardly believes it. After all, Juan Pérez has attended no swimming classes and his religion is waning, if not gone.

At dinner, Juan Pérez expresses himself forcefully about the kind of Spanish his children are speaking. It is, in his opinion, "bad English mixed with bad Spanish." They say *jale* for *trabajo*, *rolar* for *dormir*, *guachar* for *ver* or *cuidar*, and they construct sentences like "*Hage mail la carta*" or "*Está chispeanding*." They even refer to a drunken man as a *guayno*!¹⁷ Juan Pérez would like to hear his children speak good Spanish; it is a passport to the best circles, both in Mexico and in the *colonia*. He tries to be careful about his own Spanish, but he does not realize how much of the hybrid language of the district he has picked up. He was talking, the other day, to a Mexican national, recently imported for railroad track work from Mr. Pérez's own home town, Celaya.

¹⁶ *la plebe*: the populace, used somewhat in our sense of "the man on the street."

¹⁷ *trabajo*: work. *dormir*: to sleep. *ver*: to see. *cuidar*: to watch over. *Hage mail la carta*: "Mail the letter," a phrase in which the English imperative is inserted for a section of the Spanish imperative. *Está chispeanding*: "It's sprinkling," a phrase in which the English participle ending is added to a partly formed Spanish participle. *guayno*: pronounced wino, to rhyme with rhino.

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After a few moments of conversation, the national said, "*Hombre*, you talk now like all these *pochos*. I can hardly understand half your words."

The period after dinner is the zero hour in the Pérez household. There is no space for family recreation. There is hardly room for the older children to get school homework done. Every room has at least one bed in it, and the kitchen has a cot. Mrs. Pérez has succeeded, more or less, in keeping her daughters at home in the evenings or in seeing that they do not go out without supervision. She has no such control over her sons. The tradition that male freedom begins with adolescence is still strong in the *colonia*. Too often, David spends his evenings with a gang on the poorly lighted streets, or idles, in imitation of his elders, on the corner near the pool hall. Mrs. Pérez knows that boys get into police court that way, but there is nothing to hold them at home. There are few recreational outlets in the *colonia*. There is a social club at the junior high school; that would take care of one night, except that David considers the meetings dull. The Protestant settlement house has evening activities, but the Pérez family has the priest's warnings ringing in their ears. The Y is over town, on the other side of the tracks. The Catholic parish house conducts a gym class two evenings a week; David says scornfully that the only boys who attend are those on probation to the priest. David says that he wants to be where "something is going on." More than that, he wants a life of his own with meaning and purpose; he is bored with a long period of apprenticeship, much of it meaningless to him. It is useless for Mrs. Pérez to recall that, in Los Conejos, he would be launched into adult life at sixteen. It is still more useless for her to attempt to guide him with the techniques of Los Conejos, in spite of the fact that she does not know any others.

If all the family members remain at home, there is still latent friction. Linda wants to go to the movies tomorrow after school, or else just downtown to look in the stores. She will go with four other girls, and they will go straight to their destination and come straight home. The parental verdict on that is an unqualified "No!" No well-brought-up girls run the streets alone. Why, some girls even lie to their parents—Linda pricks up her ears.

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There were those girls who said they had to stay to practice for a play and spent the whole afternoon downtown meeting boys. And there is that García girl down the street. Everyone knows she deceives her parents and meets the Sánchez boy down by a neighbor's gate. The two of them have even been seen walking toward the wash at dusk! Her poor mother believes when that girl says she is just going to Dora's house. Linda and Lupe listen, quiet as mice, adding to their stock of information on how to circumvent parental dictums without being found out.

Or Frank may be feverish and logy. Grandmother Pérez goes into action at once, with her list of traditional remedies, although she knows that she is going to lose the argument. Fifteen or twenty years ago, her word would have been law, her wisdom sought by Juan and Lola Pérez. Now she has to resort to the feeble argument that "it won't do any harm." Sometimes, when the illness is not serious, she is allowed to have her way—if she can compete with the family bottle of Pulmotol.¹⁸ But, if the symptoms are grave, little Frank will have the services of a physician or of a free public clinic. Neither Juan nor Lola Pérez can remember just when and how they crossed the boundary which made traditional remedies and magical causation invalid to them, but Mrs. Pérez can remember an incident six years ago which made her realize her ideas had been transformed. "Little Frank was suddenly very sick, with fever and vomiting, one night. The grandmother said he had a cut in his finger dressed by a woman up the street, and she thought that woman was pregnant. In spite of all I could do, she went to that woman's house, at one in the morning, to ask her for a piece of underclothing. I was so ashamed!" The reply of the neighbor, who was not pregnant and who was modern in her ideas, was extremely witty, if unquotable; it is still related, with chuckles, along the street. Poor Grandmother Pérez! She is in somewhat the position of our grandmothers of a generation ago, with their home remedies of teazel, moonwort, celandine, and hart's-tongue, their fear of hospitals, and their magical lore about pregnancy.

However, it would be unfair to the Pérez household to describe

¹⁸ Pulmotol: a proprietary medicine, widely advertised in Spanish-language broadcasts, and widely used for a variety of ills in the *colonia*.

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it exclusively in terms of friction. It is true that the Pérez family is hung up between two cultures, and not so much between a "foreign" and an "American" culture as between patterns of a rural, agricultural society and those of an industrial civilization. They further suffer from isolation from the main currents of the new culture. All these things make for uncertainty, tension, and conflict. Notwithstanding, there is much in the Pérez home which is reassuring and comforting to its members; much that is valuable is nurtured there.

Juan Pérez is being neither mawkish nor hypocritical when he says, "The Mexicans live for their homes, and the mother is the heart of that home." The married children like to come back to the house on Fifth Street. It is a fine thing to have four generations together under one roof, talking, cooking, joking, and eating. Even the rebel, David, enjoys these occasions. "Things are all right at home then," he says. David's face can soften remarkably when he addresses his mother as *madrecita*. When he was confessing to an interviewer that he quarreled more and more with his father, his voice broke in spite of his determined effort to appear tough and hard. Homes are important to children of Mexican extraction, even when one is repudiating them. Every one of Lola Pérez's children wants a home of his own, as early as possible. All want as many children as they can afford. None of them expresses the sentiment that "if it doesn't work out, we can always get divorced"; marriages are intended to last.

Lola Pérez wanted and loved her children as much as Grandmother Pérez wanted and loved hers, even though Lola's children are liabilities, rather than assets, in an industrial society. "A Mexican baby never cries," she says. "There is always someone passing by to comfort and love him." The depression and a series of *visitadoras*¹⁹ taught Lola Pérez to be ashamed of her fecundity. She was actually rather relieved when her last pregnancy ended in a miscarriage, yet uneasy for feeling relief. Everything in her background urges her to take pleasure and pride in being fruitful. She can hardly understand her daughter Lolita's sharp limiting of her family "so that they can have advantages,"

¹⁹ *visitadoras*: visitor (female), the colony's word for case aides from public welfare agencies.

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although Mrs. Pérez recognizes it as an American standard. Even now, in the last of her childbearing years, she secretly would like another baby; although she knows that the rest of the family, including her husband, would groan under the added economic burden. Linda and Lupe, little girls though they are, have caught much of this idea that childbearing is an honorable and important function; and it may be that, when they reach maturity, they will find, unlike Lolita, that American standards confirm them in this belief.

Romantic literature, still more romantic movies, and the attitudes of American teachers and social workers have confirmed the Pérez children in a belief that their parents do not "love" each other; that, in particular, Lola Pérez is a drudge and a slave for her husband. Judged from the romantic point of view, she certainly is, and none of that sort of "love" which trails clouds of glamour is discernible around the Pérez household. Juan Pérez demonstrates little of what an American schoolteacher would consider tenderness or consideration. The household is run to suit him. He insists bluntly on certain male rights. He seldom lifts a hand at household tasks. He expects his word to be law, or at least to be questioned only indirectly. He has not often been physically unfaithful, probably no more than the average American male; but his society recognizes the right of man to stray and Juan Pérez is aware that this privilege exists. He works, as he says, "like a burro," and he expects his wife to do the same. It is no life for a physically weak woman, nor one who expects to be catered to. But neither is the life of a struggling farmer nor an unskilled workman, in our society, adapted to such a woman.

The Pérez children, however, are not making such comparisons; they are viewing their home through spectacles recently placed upon their noses by Hollywood or American spinsters. At adolescence, they are most sharply critical; later, if the experience of their older brothers and sisters is any criterion, they will remember things overlooked a few years earlier. They will remember that it was the *madrecita's* influence which determined critical family decisions. "My father did the talking," said a young Mexican-American, "but it was my mother who really decided things. Whether we would move, whether my sisters could

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have new dresses, whether we children would stay on in school, even whether my father would change jobs. I think my father realized it and depended on her, although nothing could have made him say so." David Pérez, who now remembers his mother's prayers when his father was ill with pneumonia, will later remember his father's plunge into despair when Lola Pérez almost died after a miscarriage. When Juan Pérez brought Lola to the United States after he had been here a year and spent his last ten dollars to marry her "by the church" he made a lifetime decision, in the words of the children's hop-scotch song, *por toda mi vida un casario*.²⁰ When Juan and Lola Pérez grow older, they will grow closer, like two old work animals, bound by mutual labor, suffering, failures, and misunderstandings as much as by happier ties. This is not a romantic sort of marriage, nor is it a perfect one. It leaves much to be desired on the score of sensitivity and companionship, but it has one great strength: it was intended to last.

Those Cultural Differences

The great objection to setting up a hypothetical "average," a generic personage like Juan Pérez, is, of course, that he doesn't exist. One runs the danger of replacing one stereotype by another. The newer generalized picture may be truer to fact and more perceptive, but it still bears the mark of the rubber stamp. Let no one imagine that the sketched outlines of Juan Pérez may be fitted, like a frame, over individual personalities, families, and situations in Mexican-American society. The fit will be poor. There will be bulges here and unfilled portions there, some of them occurring at critical points. There is as much range of individual behavior, as many varying and different personalities, in the *colonia* as there are on the other side of town—perhaps more. Anyone dealing with members of a minority group, as a teacher, social worker, employer, public official, or whatever, should inoculate himself against the stereotype. It may be psychologically cheap to use, but when you have said that, you have explored any possible advantage. The methods of Procrustes were

²⁰ *por toda mi vida un casario*: for all of my life, one marriage.

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also simple and easy; he got a nice fit without any loose ends. Unfortunately, his clients died.

The story of Juan Pérez was not intended to set up a stereotype. It is to be hoped it will never be used as such. It was meant to simplify and personalize some experiences which are common to a great many Americans of Mexican origin. It must be emphasized, however, that details of experience and attitudes growing out of them are not interchangeable between individuals. Every personality, every home, has its differences, as in our society. However, as in our homes, certain outlines of living patterns may be discerned among the details; and common group experience has led to common attitudes and reactions. This is what the Juan Pérez story has been intended to typefy. Because people are always more real to us than statistics and abstractions, Juan Pérez has been given flesh and blood, speech and emotion. For understanding, nothing can replace the face-to-face contact, sympathetically and naturally made. Within the limitations of the written word, the Juan Pérez sketch attempts to let the reader step into a household which is "typical" in many respects and observe, with as few barriers as possible, what happens there. It must be emphasized that the observations have been strained twice, as it were—once through the mind of the writer, herself of a different culture, and again through the mind of the reader, with his eyes on a printed page.

But even from this twice-refined product, some sharp outlines stand forth. The most salient fact is that cultural difference, if it is to be interpreted in a connotation of "foreignness," is not great. The Mexican-American shares our material culture almost completely; he would share more if he had more money. Certainly he has shown no disposition to prefer a *petate* to a mattress or a *canasta*²¹ to a paper sack. On the non-material side, he has thrown a whole complex of magical medicine out of the window in preference for proprietary medicines and public clinics. The religion which involved a personal intimacy with regional and local saints has been replaced by nominal church attendance, as carelessly nominal as a great deal of American church-going. In earning a living, the immigrant has adjusted himself to a money

²¹ *canasta*: a woven container.

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economy and an industrial world with surprising flexibility, considering that his position in it is disadvantaged and precarious. He has no hankering today for some little *milpas*; he wants, like other Americans, a good job with a future and a regular pay check.

There are three areas in which culture survival seems to be strongest: language, food habits, and family life. Even here, nothing is static. Much has changed in the past, and it is changing today while one looks at it, with the trend all toward Americanization. The Spanish spoken by the second-generation is hybrid Spanish, full of Hispanized English words, Anglicized Spanish words, English verb endings tacked to Spanish words, and English sentence construction. Very few of the second generation write good Spanish. They spell phonetically: "ay" for *hay*, "callo" for *cayó*, and so on. Unless second-generation members have specifically taken Spanish in school, they cannot read it. Editors of Spanish-language papers frankly admit that, in ten years or so, the bulk of their news will have to be printed in English. Most parents wish their children to speak Spanish as well as English, but the difficulties in the way of a second- or third-generation person attaining a command of correct, precise, and flexible Spanish are large.

Food habits, at first glance, seem to persist strongly, and in all classes. The poorer families, if one examines their weekly menus, run heavily to *frijoles*, *tortillas*, *sopas*,²² and chile sauces. Even the well-to-do and highly "Americanized" families like to have *choriza*, Spanish rice, or *chile verde*²³ at one meal a day. They will say, in hiring a servant, "at least she knows how to make the old dishes." But, if one looks closer, culture survival is only partial. The traditional methods of preparing and procuring the Mexican dishes are gone. No one grinds corn; few make *masa*. Business firms in the *colonia* have taken over these tasks. And the old cuisine, even in the poorer homes, is shot full of holes in the form of peanut butter, jello, potato salad, hamburgers, bakers' bread, commercial cookies, and pancake flour. Children for two

²² *sopa*: soup.

²³ *chile verde*: a meat sauce made with green chiles, commonly used with pork.

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decades have fought a determined battle on the question of *tortillas* in school lunches, with the result that *tortillas* are growing to be something eaten just because the old folks want them.

When it comes to a matter of family life, one's subject material becomes at once less concrete and more unmanageable. The most common experience in talking with informants was to be given a description of "the Mexican home," drawn in bold, substantial, unequivocal outline, consistent in every detail. Just as I was feeling solid ground under my feet, the speaker would add, "But, of course, we don't do a lot of those things in our home. And the Rios family, down the street, do things very differently. And Mrs. Villa conducts her house practically like you people. But, on the other hand, old Mrs. Amaya—" By the time I had gone through a dozen such interviews, that nice, neat structure labeled "the Mexican home" had been partially torn down, remodeled, repartitioned, and even redecorated. Some rooms looked thoroughly American, with even a touch of Hollywood décor; others might have been lifted straight from Los Conejos. The familial architecture and color scheme were anything but consistent and by no means entirely Mexican. Still, through the mass of detail, outlines could be glimpsed which corresponded to that "Mexican home" which had originally been defined for me.

What Mexican-American life in the United States really constitutes is a sub-culture—not a sub-culture of Hispanic life, but a sub-culture of our own civilization. Let us imagine that two stone disks, each containing distinctive raised patterns, were ground, one on the other, for thirty years. And let us further imagine that the top disk was placed in a position to exert superior force and pressure. If we separated the two stones later, we would find that the top stone had very few marks on it, but that the bottom stone had many of its patterns eradicated, many blurred beyond recognition, and scarcely any untouched. If we continued to examine the bottom stone, we would become increasingly aware of the impress of the top stone and of the pressures and forces which had driven it. We would see how a commercial pressure had bitten deeply, obliterating whole areas of complicated design, and we might be surprised to see that an educational system had left different tracings from those

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we had expected. Some of the top patterns might have dug so deeply as to leave a design below in inverse. But, whatever we saw, we would be seeing chiefly the imprint of our own culture, with only a little of the original pattern of the subordinate stone clearly evident. We would have difficulty deciding whether those surviving areas existed because the dominant culture exerted little pressure there, or because the original design had some unsuspected strength. But, even where we could pick out a traceable Hispanic design, as in family life, there would be numerous scars and grooves—the mark of the dominant culture.

The story of Juan Pérez suggests some of the original pattern, as well as some of the forces which are remodeling it. Lolita, with her resolve to have only as many children as she can give “proper advantages,” and her list of things she “won’t stand for” from her husband, strikes a note quite different from her mother’s. David, reaching for the privileges of a man at sixteen, is echoing Los Conejos. But when he feels that his father doesn’t “love” his mother, he is judging by American standards. A change in family patterns is essentially a second-generation process, for an immigrant group. The first generation has no chance to learn other ways; furthermore, it may cling to old attitudes because these constitute a familiar oasis in a changing world. It may try to pull the second-generation back to the shelter of the familiar and traditional pattern—the first-generation Mexican is by no means convinced, from the glimpses he has been vouchsafed of “the American home,” American youth, womanhood, and recreation, that these represent superior and desirable patterns. When Descanso, in discussing delinquency among youthful Mexican-Americans, attributes it to the fact that the Mexican home is “low” and “has no standards,” the appraisal is wide of the mark. The difficulty often lies in too many competing standards.

A second difficulty lies in the fact that the original pattern and standards are little understood by those who deal with deviant Mexican-American youth. Among law-enforcement and probation agencies in Descanso, one could count the persons who have any knowledge of a Mexican home on the fingers of one hand—and there would still be five fingers left. The score among educa-

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tors is somewhat higher, but infinitesimally so. What knowledge there is often goes to feed the stereotype. View from above is likely to be both flattened and foreshortened, at best. Astigmatism hardly improves the vista. The great range of individual difference, as well as the great vitality of community standards, constitute unknown and unexplored territory for most Anglo-Americans.

CHAPTER VI

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The Mexican Home—Theme and Variations

THROUGHOUT Latin America, family life receives a slightly different emphasis than it does in the United States;¹ one is tempted to say, at the risk of raising some inter-cultural storms, that it receives a stronger emphasis. Certainly, the family unit is larger than the American one, which is likely to consist of the parents—in some cases only one—and a child or two. In Latin America, the family includes not only parents and children, but an extended circle of relatives as well. Several generations are likely to live under the same roof-tree. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins are considered part of the intimate family circle; so are the various godparents and their relatives. They visit back and forth frequently; they form a common council in crisis or times of decision; they furnish mutual aid and provide a bulwark of interlocked strength for the individual. They may also censor and limit freedom to a degree we would find irksome, but, at least, the person in such a society is not alone in the world. Helpful, if interfering, hands are always present. The child in such a society has not only his parents upon whom to rely, but an alternate set in the form of godparents, as well as some more substitutes among his blood relatives. In early days in America, we had such an approach to such a consanguineal family—with the exception of godparent relationships, which did not exist in a Protestant society. Our extended family has been lost, apparently beyond hope of restoration, in the process of expansion and industrialization; but in Latin America such fam-

¹ Kingsley Davis, "Changing Modes of Marriage: Contemporary Family Types," *Marriage and the Family*, ed. Reuben Hill and Howard Becker, Heath, 1943, pp. 100-107.

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ilies exist, not merely among the wealthy and powerful, but in poor communities like Los Conejos.

Family relationships are meant to endure, no matter what the strain. The average Latin-American looks with undisguised horror upon our practice of divorce and remarriage, particularly when children are involved. We, however, are inclined to regard the frank admission of a double standard of morals—Latin America's solution to the strain of monogamy—with equal horror. In most circles of Latin-American society, men are not expected to be inexperienced before marriage or to remain faithful afterward. It may be argued that the average American male observes neither pre- nor post-marital scruples too closely. The point is, however, that he is supposed to—our ideals of marriage include it. The Latin-American ideals put their emphasis on the continuity of marriage, the importance of children, and the purity of wives and mothers. "Good" women are protected, not only from men, but from themselves—for there is realistic admission that erotic response is not the exclusive property of the male. The whole system of cloistering girls and women has its base in this admission.

The exact position of women in such a society is puzzling. Legally, women have little status, compared to ours. They are supposed to know nothing of business; they do not control property. In the event of separation or divorce, they would have difficulty gaining custody of their children. It looks like a man's world, with a heavy patriarchal accent. The sufferings of many helpless and unprotected women would bear witness that it was. But the "good" woman, entrenched with her children in the circle of the great family, has some peculiar and wide-reaching powers. As the *madrecita*, entitled to respect and homage, she may actually dominate, in all matters that affect her children. Hers may be the deciding voice in every important decision. As grandmother she may develop into a despot, benevolent or otherwise. There are plenty of firm, purposeful feminine faces in Latin America, whether they are under *rebosas* or coiffures; there are plenty of men who have quailed before the collective femininity of the extended family.

Children are expected to give obedience and respect, not only

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to their parents, but to the many adults in the great family who stand in the position of alternate parents. Good manners stand high in the list of desirable attributes for children, even in humble homes. "Character" is taught, not so much by moral precept as by example—many examples.² In return for the adult domination which is not to be questioned—and seldom is—children are loved and made much of, quite extravagantly, by our standards. This type of upbringing has many valuable aspects. The warmth and security of many close personal relationships surround these children. In the laboratory of the great family, they practice for the world; family life is an apprenticeship, containing many varied experiences. Even in adult life, the family is always there as a haven. Families are very durable, if they have consanguineal ties.

Boys and girls are given a differential upbringing. The girl is trained for the home, the boy for the world. Girls are expected to have less education and much less experience. The sexes are separated from late childhood on. Boys have opportunities for initiation into men's experience at adolescence; girls are carefully sheltered from free or casual contact with the other sex. Such sheltering, however, does not mean *isolation* from potential marriage partners. Latin-American society provides its girls ample opportunity to meet future mates, whether through the chaperoned social gathering of the upper classes or the communal participation in work and play of a community like Los Conejos. It wants its young to marry early, but with their choices controlled by the family and the community.

Behind the outline of the "Mexican home" which one glimpses in the *colonia* can be seen the solid framework of Latin-American family life. Both are ideals, it must be emphasized, and attainment of them often falls short in practice, just as our ideals do. Furthermore, the "Mexican home," as it exists in the United States, is constantly subjected to the impact of American ideas regarding marriage and the family. Mobility and poverty, to

² The value to a child of growing up in a world where there are many adult models, rather than one or two, to copy and identify himself with has been emphasized by many psychologists. Tolman even argues against class-structured societies on this basis. (Edward C. Tolman, *Drive Toward War*, Appleton-Century, 1942.)

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which many a Mexican immigrant family was subjected, have decreased consanguineal ties; public co-education has dealt the sheltering of girls a body blow. Our ideas about feminine status have undermined male authority. "Mexican homes" exist in all degrees of adjustment to the new or clinging to the old, but all of them have some hints, faint in some cases, pronounced in others, of Latin-American family patterns.

The Pérez family, from one point of view, might be called an average family which has made average adjustment in home patterns. Far more important than "averages," however, are the standards which pull groups one way or another. Lola Pérez is conscious of the fact that another, and possibly better, standard exists in the *colonia*; she is watching its workings and making judgments. She is not going to abandon traditional techniques until she is sure she is not jumping from the frying-pan into the fire, but she is interested in the experimentation of others. "Do you think those merchants' wives," she asks, "who do things more the American way, have happy homes?" The daughter of Mrs. N—, one of the "big people" in the *colonia*, makes a good marriage, despite the freedom she has been allowed—the result may very well be a modification in the cloistering of the Pérez girls. But woe betide the cause of progress if Mrs. N—'s daughter gets herself involved in a scandal. If Mrs. V— is "very modern," but still seems to have the "Mexican ideal of the home," Lola Pérez is impressed by the fact that such a combination may be workable.

Many of the second generation and those of the first generation who are prosperous and better educated commonly express an ideal which they call "having the best of both ways." It applies to many things—language, friendships, personal ethics—but perhaps most of all to family life. It implies receptivity to American culture patterns and the recognition that those patterns, of necessity, will probably dominate in most areas. But it retains the right to reject even widely accepted American standards in favor of retention of Mexican ways which seem valuable. It is this experimentation which Lola Pérez watches closely. She has some confidence in it because it does not ask her to deny her birthright.

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Linda Cerna is one of those "modern" women; she and her husband, Julian, frequently talk of "having the best of both ways." Now in their middle thirties, both were quasi-immigrants; that is, they were brought to the United States as young children. With less than high school educations, they have done well, economically. Julian's wage of \$275 a month as a skilled workman (he earned \$160 before the war) enabled them to make payments on a house in the north part of the *colonia* and to provide for the needs of three children. Linda worked, before her marriage, in a small "American" clothing store; she worked occasionally afterward, in times of financial crisis. She considers herself her husband's partner, with an equal voice in family decisions—but she is careful to make that voice indirect. "I think men like to be the leaders," she says, easily. There is a great deal of companionship between husband and wife; Julian feels small temptation to stray from his hearth, except for male companionship. But if he did? Linda is a little uncertain. "I suppose you American women wouldn't stand for anything like that," she says.

Family connections mean a great deal to the Cernas; the small house is likely to be full of visiting relatives. The children's godparents are Linda and Julian's close friends. Is there illness in a sister-in-law's family? Linda takes in four extra people without a thought. Is the living-room furniture a little shabby? "I was just ready to buy a new set when Julian's nephew went into business—we loaned him a little something." Or, "I was *madrina*³ for the Villegas baby—one has to do those things right." Linda admits that relatives and godparents are not quite what they used to be. "So many families are separated. They move around. Godparents don't adopt an orphaned child, now, if there is another relative to do it. Some of these young girls wouldn't have any godparents for their babies if the old ladies didn't insist. I think having godparents is nice, though—nice for the children."

Linda was brought up very strictly. Her parents discouraged male visitors at the house; she could not walk home from school with boys; she never went anywhere alone. "You would think

³ *madrina*: godmother.

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papá and *mamá* didn't want me to marry." Despite restrictions, Linda managed to meet young men. "The way I met Julian—my friend Delfina and I said we were going to practice for a play, but we went to a dance. I danced with Julian all the time. We met after that, whenever I could manage it. Julian had actually asked me to marry him before *mamá* had even set eyes on him, although I think she knew about us. We went through all the fixings, *pedir la mano*⁴ and all the rest, to please the old folks. Even waited another six months. No wonder these young girls elope."

Linda Cerna is not going to bring up her daughters in this fashion. "Betty is fourteen, and already I'm giving little parties for her, with boys and girls invited. My neighbors may call me an *alcahueta*,⁵ if they wish, but my girls are going to meet their boy friends at home. If Betty wants dates, when she's sixteen, I'll let her go out with several couples in a crowd. But none of this running around all night with one boy, the way those American girls up on Tenth do. There is a lot to be said for the Mexican way of keeping an eye on your girls, if it isn't overdone."

About her son's adolescence, Linda is not so certain. "He isn't going to chase women when he's a mere kid, the way some of these boys do. But suppose my Luis wants to be a doctor—he will be thirty before he can marry. What do your people say to your young men? Just to take cold baths and get exercise and things like that? Maybe they don't listen very well, any more than ours would. Well, I hope Luis marries early." Throughout the *colonia*, early marriage, whether or not accompanied by financial security, is considered the solution to the young male's sex problems. Pretending that there is no problem does not appeal to a group with a gift for realism.

Linda subscribes to *Parents' Magazine* and has tried to bring up her children "the American way," on schedules and formulas. "Not always, though—they had their sips of *chile verde* and stayed up all hours when we had company. I think, if you're too

⁴ *pedir la mano*: to ask for a girl's hand, formally, usually with the aid of an intermediary.

⁵ *alcahueta*: literally, a female panderer; used in the *colonia* in a softened sense, to indicate a woman who is so anxious to marry off her daughters that she permits young men to come to the house.

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fussy, you make the children fussy." On discipline, Linda departs radically from the advice of *Parents' Magazine*. There are scoldings and spankings in the Cerna household. "You heard me say '*Déjalo!*'⁶ now to little Dora. It sounded harsh. She obeyed—it was like the policeman's whistle. I could have said, 'Dora, dear, don't touch the nice lady's purse,' but it wouldn't have worked so well." Linda makes the point, however, that discipline is impersonal, not the outlet for a parent's spite or nerves. "When Julian spanks Luis, he always says, 'Now, I am not mad at you. You know you deserve this. It is to make you remember and it will hurt plenty.'" Parental unity is strong in this household. "You may have noticed," Linda says, "that, when I correct the children, Julian says nothing. When *he* disciplines, I leave it to him. The children know the silence is agreement. When there are differences over the children, it is not before them. Those things are discussed, in our Mexican phrase, 'under the quilts.'"

Julian and Linda have never thought of the possibility of divorce, but they have friends who have considered it and a few who have actually dissolved their marriages. Their judgment varies, according to circumstances. "You know, we people are against divorce," Linda says, "but there are times when it is all right. Take my cousin Julia. Her husband ran off and deserted her and the little baby. She divorced. She was young and she remarried happily. How much better than going back to her parents, with her life over, in the old way. But take those Maldonados. Everyone knows she just cared for a good time. She wouldn't settle down, she had no feeling for her home. People don't think too well of her, for her divorce." Divorce under the latter circumstances is known as American style and quite generally frowned on; but divorce as a relief from intolerable conditions—with the definition of intolerable fairly strict—is accepted even by conservative grandmothers.

The group in the *colonia*, generally the more economically secure, which is progressing toward a fusion with American life, has its disorganized fringe. This group is not large, but it is important, because to people like Lola Pérez it demonstrates the latent dangers of American ways. The Maldonados belonged

⁶ *Déjalo!*: leave it alone!

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to this group. A couple in their thirties, with a fair income from a small colony business, they tried to graft Hollywood-country club mores on a Mexican home, with unappetizing results. They drank too much; they "ran around." They quarreled, with gloves off, before their two children, who rapidly ceased to be either well-mannered or well-adjusted. Mrs. Maldonado tried to pay back her husband for his affairs, first by flirting, finally in a more serious fashion. The whole thing blew up in a scandal which gave *la plebe* something to talk about for months. It convinced Mrs. Pérez, for some time, that acculturation and iniquity were synonymous.

By contrast, a household like the Robles looks stable. Enrique Robles is one of three or four well-to-do men who maintain a *casa chica*, a second establishment, much as their counterparts in a Mexican city might. He has maintained it for years, with the same woman, and will probably continue it for some years more, in spite of the fact that the "other woman" is older and superficially less attractive than his wife. Everyone knows about it; no one pays much attention to it—Mr. Robles' business standing and influence are not affected thereby, so long as he discharges his responsibilities toward his family. He is also expected to conduct his extra-marital activities "without grossness" and with a fair degree of responsibility toward the third person involved. Enrique Robles regards with repugnance the Anglo-American who escapes from monogamy via recourse to prostitution or the casual affair. Apparently, Mrs. Robles agrees, to an extent, with this view, because there is no open rift in the household; Mrs. Robles appears satisfied with her sphere of children, church, relatives, and household.

However, the youngest of the *colonia's* leaders, those of high school and college age, are setting themselves firmly against the Latin double standard. Enrique Robles, still young and handsome, would be surprised to hear himself characterized as "one of those old guys," "old-fashioned," and "dumb." His example seems neither seductive nor glamorous to the alert young. Whether they will fall into the defects of our single standard, including those of "serial monogamy"—frequent divorce and remarriage, remains to be seen.

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The family of Juan Pérez may be considered a stable family, in spite of the frictions of transition which exist in it. It fulfills many functions of mutual aid and affection, together with some functions of mutual purpose. The great bulk of the families in the *colonia* are of this type. Whether they lose or gain in stability depends upon the fashion in which fusion with American life is made. The Juan Pérez group also has its disorganized fringes. Here, because of increased pressures of economic uncertainty, poor education, and limited outlook, the results of disorganization are more serious for the individual. Here are the old couples, decent and hard-working enough, but completely unadjusted to the American scene. Here are the disoriented, tough, drifting boys, the *pachucos*⁷ and their admirers. Here are the families whose domestic embroilments bring the police, or whose apathy and hopelessness find their escape in drunkenness, or whose dirty and disorderly children are the despair of teachers. These are the people the rest of the *colonia* characterizes as the "anybodies," the "ignorant," the "people without shame."

Cuca Garcés, a neighbor of the Pérez family, belongs to this fringe. She has eight children. Her husband is a pregnancy deserter, but he always comes back. Family fights are frequent and they culminate in violence. Three of the boys have made frequent appearances in juvenile court. The married girls have achieved matrimony just a shade ahead of maternity; the younger girls are bold in manner and coarse in speech, by Mexican standards. Although the family has been spared the ultimate disgrace of a daughter who produces an illegitimate child, the possibility is always present. Still, the Garcés family is one which attempts the strictest, most unenlightened cloistering of its girls. Whippings of all the children are frequent—one cannot say that Cuca Garcés does not try, according to her lights.

On the same street lives Bernarda Sánchez, a widow with three daughters. Mrs. Sánchez deviates from group standards in that she is more advanced, more "Americanized." She permits her daughters the same supervised freedom Linda Cerna would allow hers—and there are no community reproaches. She is seldom

⁷ *pachucos*: a slang term of uncertain origin, applied to juvenile gang members of Mexican descent.

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called an *alcahueta*; instead people say, "Oh, that's just her way. She's different." Lola Pérez even faces with equanimity the fact that the Sánchez girls attend the Protestant settlement house, although she would not let her own daughters step on its sidewalk. She says, without rancor, "Señora Sánchez sees things differently."

If anything distinguishes the society of the *colonia*, it is the great latitude allowed for individual behavior. There is little attempt to make people conform to one pattern, as alike turned out as if with the same cookie-cutter. "He's different." "It's his way." "Those Amayas have always seen things differently." These and similar remarks underline a point of view by which people are considered more interesting because of their peculiarities. To the sociologist who makes a fetish of "community controls," this may connote disorganization. To others, it may recall the remark Ernest Gruening made about Mexico:

. . . there is an atmosphere of personal independence unknown in most parts of the United States. In Mexico, a man may live as he pleases, think what he pleases, say what he pleases—that is considered his own business. He is not ostracized for it. Neither organized society, nor self-appointed regulators of morals, beliefs, or personal acts seek to regiment him in a mass formation, to conventional standards.⁸

To such a society, dominant Descanso's generalizations about how *all* Mexicans are such-and-such, or *all* Mexicans do so-and-so, are profoundly irritating. To the student of such a society, the great liberality with which individual difference is regarded makes it difficult to draw a nicely delimited, neatly regimented picture. In general, it may be said that the great bulk of families in the *colonia* have family patterns similar to that of the Pérez home. The upper level families and many second generation homes, regardless of income or status, approximate the Cerna standards. But exceptions all along the line are numerous.

Classes

From the outline sketched of various modifications of the "Mexican home," hints of class division in standards emerge.

⁸ Ernest Gruening, *Mexico and Its Heritage*, Appleton-Century, 1936, p. 641.

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Linda Cerna and her husband are on their way to becoming *señores grandes*, "big people," in the *colonia*. Depending upon the leadership Julian demonstrates in colony affairs, they will be respected and admired, not merely for their comparative economic security, but for their attitudes and actions. The Maldonados are losing status, but they are still in a satellite top group, as in the Robles family. Rated above them all are the leaders and their families, distinguished by their position as a liaison group with the Anglo-American world. The total top group is small, but the influence of its standards on the rest of the *colonia* is great. As one of its members remarked, ruefully, "We are aped. When we fail, a hundred others never try. When we have feet of clay, we give impetus to the worst among our people." Certainly the "big people" are criticized and gossiped about, their every failure marked, their missteps magnified. But the critical interest seems to be that of identification rather than remoteness. When Lola Pérez speculates about the domestic felicity of the merchants' wives, she is forming judgments about her future path of action and that of her daughters. The "big people" might be thought of as the precocious children of the parent colony, venturing where their elders cannot, while those elders watch every step—agonizing, criticizing, fearing repudiation, half proud and half angry.

Families similar to that of Juan Pérez form the numerical bulk of the *colonia*. Among this second class, there are many different informal groupings, based on relationship, primarily, but to some extent on occupation. However, this group is inclined to think of itself as a unit, even though its second generation members may be on their way to the top group or actually arrived there. Its families who "live decently" dissociate themselves sharply from the disorganized fringe of their group, although they recognize—because they have seen it happen—that individuals and families formerly "decent" may slip into disorganization. In the disorganized fringe, personal loneliness and isolation tend to replace the relationship and kinship bonds which bind families on the Juan Pérez level to others of their kind. "My godfather?" said one of Cuca Garcés's sons. "Why, my father had

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to ask a man he hardly knew—the man went away up north to pick fruit and we never saw him again.”

Descanso's *colonia* falls into a two-class division readily. To try to make it fit a triple division of “upper,” “lower,” and “middle” is to violate the distinctions which its members make and the terms in which they express them. Out of a mass of gossip, conversations, and judgment, the classification which emerges is always of two groups: the “big people” and their satellites, including a disorganized fringe; the commoner folk and their disorganized fringe. To an extent, this division reflects the nature of the original immigration, with its bulk of folk people and its sprinkling of individuals from Mexico's middle class. But only to an extent, and a rapidly decreasing one, are determinations of status made in the *colonia* on the basis of former origins in Mexico. The top group contains some persons whose origins in Mexico were “folk,” many quasi-immigrants whose parents had such origins, and an increasing number of second-generation persons who have risen within the structure of the *colonia*. Many things are more important than family—some things are even more important than money—in the determination of higher status.

Dominant Descanso, with its allergy to skin colors, is likely to imagine that the man who is Creole or light *mestizo* in appearance has an advantage over the Indian type—whatever the latter may be! It is always attempting to compliment lighter-skinned individuals by saying, “But you don't look like a *Mexican*—you look like high-type Spanish to me.” This dubious flattery is the source of much robust laughter in the colony; its few poseurs who show signs of accepting the appellation of “Spanish” are treated to cutting ridicule. The middle-class person from Mexico is likely to think that all Spaniards are pimps and perverts; to the folk person, the Spaniard is the hated spur-wearer, the oppressor. “I went to this fancy tea,” said a pretty girl, “and the woman who was introducing me kept adding, ‘But of course my little friend is really Spanish.’ Finally I said, ‘Listen, I may be a Mexican in a fur coat, but I'm still a Mexican. Where I was born it's an insult to be called a Spaniard.’” One of the colony leaders, a man distinctly Creole in appearance, replied to such

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insinuations with: "I beg your pardon, madame, but I am Indian."

Descanso overlooks a few things. One is that Mexico itself is *mestizo*; there is no ruling white clique and has not been for some time. Persons predominantly Indian, genetically, may compose a large portion of the disadvantaged classes, but many of these persons have held the highest positions in the nation. "*Soy indio*"⁹ has been, at times, a passport to government circles. The *mestizo*, light or dark, is a person of influence. A few descendants of land-owning families may boast of pure Spanish descent; but their voices are faint and their claims, by and large, dubious. Preoccupation with skin colors, as we know it, does not exist. "That is something we had to learn from you people," the *colonia* remarks. The foremost standard on which the *colonia* insists is that one must be proud of Mexican origins—*mestizo* origins. The term *la raza* embraces this feeling. The man who disclaims *la raza* will find that neither money nor any other sort of influence will compensate for his error.

This self-respecting pride in one's background and origins strikes a rather new note in American immigrant histories. The man who changed his name, denied his background, and was ashamed of the old folks with the accented English and foreign ways is a commonplace type among other immigrant groups. He is a distinct rarity among Mexican-Americans, except for some badly confused adolescents; and his actions, rather than being admired as a hallmark of success, are described as "his misfortune," as though he had a strange affliction. "Assimilation! I am tired of that word," said one of the *colonia's* leaders. "Fusion is what we want—the best of both ways." A young American of Mexican descent, speaking at a club luncheon, was told by a gentleman of Swedish ancestry: "We Scandinavians got ahead because we dropped our old-country ways." "Perhaps that was your misfortune," was the reply.

If pride in being Mexican is indispensable for status, education—the claim to it or the interest in it—comes second. A doctor or a lawyer is given an unquestioned (and usually unquestioning)

⁹ *Soy indio*: I am an Indian.

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audience. The possessor of a Ph.D. can write his own ticket. A fledgling schoolmaster, struggling on a limited salary, is received where the *cantina* owner, even if his pockets bulge with money, cannot hope to penetrate. The editor of a newspaper has a certain position ready-made. Not all of the circle of the "big people" is composed, by any means, of persons who have had higher educations, but the others demonstrate an interest in it. Good manners, the use of good Spanish, and cultivated ways are thought of as part of education. People like the Cernas, neither of whom finished high school, make the most of these latter assets.

Needless to say, the possession of money helps status. The persons who have good incomes, nice homes, who dress well and entertain generously, are likely to collect together at the top. But money alone will not insure status. There are several men in the colony who make and spend a great deal of money, comparatively speaking, who own and control property, or who have secret and influential connections with dominant Descanso, but who are not eligible to count among the "big men" of the district. If the money is made from a *cantina*, from a gambling game which is suspected of paying off to the police, from open catering to the vices of either Mexican- or Anglo-American, or from frank exploitation of one's own people, it is not desirable money. Its possessor may be an important figure in his own half-world and, through pulling financial strings, may extend his influence slightly; but he is not eligible for top rank. If he adds to his handicaps, as he usually does, that of being a person of "no education," his case is all the more hopeless. The position of the Maldonados, for instance, might have survived scandal, but it is not going to survive Mr. Maldonado's financial backing of a dubious *cantina* or his former wife's increasing conversational *groserias*.¹⁰

Financial success is not defined as making a lot of money, but as making a nice living or living decently. The ambition to make a lot of money and so buy one's way into American life has distinguished many an immigrant group, particularly its second-generation members. Money is appreciated in the *colonia*, but merely because it provides a more satisfactory life. Sights are

¹⁰ *groseria*: ill-bred, coarse speech.

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seldom raised to include the amassing of money for the sake of its power and prestige. The possession of a great deal of money is thought of as being dangerous. "A man with too much money does not sleep well at night." "People with money spend all their time locking it up." It is true that opportunity has been so limited that ambition may not have had soil in which to grow. However, an instance or two can be cited in which an able man actually saw a path to big money-making and turned aside from it. Fear of failure may have played a part in this decision, but the reasons given were ones such as "Oh, I live well enough now" or "I get along well on what I have." The man who strains and strives is not admired—the man who "lives well" is.

In a less highly competitive society than ours, the latter type might be considered an enviable figure, a man who was achieving a golden mean of effort and enjoyment. In our society, he is in danger of being considered unambitious. The emphasis on monetary success in the *colonia* may change, if additional opportunity opens. However, the ambitions of the second-generation leaders show a continued emphasis on a "good" life, rather than a financially successful one. The most widely voiced criticism of Anglo-Americans is that "they will do anything for money" or that they "put money ahead of everything." It is reminiscent of the stereotype of the *Yanqui* heard throughout Latin America. Like all stereotypes, it leads to misjudgments of individuals and groups; but basically, it appears to voice a protest that money, while it is important and useful, should not be put first.

The preferred occupations in the *colonia* are, of course, the professions, although very few achieve them. Able young men of high school and college age want to be doctors, lawyers, teachers, social workers or ministers. A second choice is that of having one's own business. Merchants, even those whose businesses are small, have a preferred status, although the realistic young are beginning to think that a skilled occupation might be a better bet. Men holding skilled, well-paid jobs with the Santa Fe or other corporations have much the same position in the colony as the merchant. Occupationally, the line is drawn about here. The semi-skilled or unskilled industrial worker may be known as a "good man" or a "decent man," but he is seldom a "big

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man." The agricultural and domestic occupations are rated as the least desirable of all. It is safe to say that one could not counsel a youth of Mexican extraction into anything having to do with agriculture—a skilled agronomist would still sound like "fruit picker" to him. The Santa Fe laborer will say, with pride, "I never picked an orange in my life." A second-generation member who has achieved standing in the *colonia* will quite freely say that he came from a poor family and lived in a shack, but he will hesitate about admitting that his father picked fruit, cotton, or vegetables.

Occupation in itself, however, does not insure status. Willingness to be of service to one's group bulks large. The lawyer or the merchant who is known to make his living through flagrant exploitation will find himself losing standing rapidly. "He tried to make money out of the misfortunes of the poor," Juan Pérez will say of such a man. "Yes, he has a certain influence, but everyone knows he is not a good man." Or, "People say his gambling ruined him, but he started that after he knew people did not trust him." Allied with the feeling that a man must never disclaim *la raza* is the tenet that a man who claims standing must work for the betterment of his group.

A Santa Fe foreman may be active in the Confederation of Mexican Societies, an organization controlling the endeavors of four mutual aid societies. He is distinguished from other men on his level as a "man who takes an interest," a "good man," or even "a leader," in a limited sense. The laborer, even the orange picker, who takes up the neighborhood collections for decent burial in time of disaster, comes to be singled out in his group. The merchant who is patient about furnishing affidavits for public agencies, advice to people in financial difficulties, and sympathy to those in personal distress will stand out from other merchants who confine their interests to their own affairs. The top men, the five or six acknowledged leaders, hold their position by virtue of the fact that they are able to work in a wider, bolder fashion for *la raza*. There may be criticism in the *colonia* of their undertakings, or disagreement on details of their methods; such discussion implies, not repudiation, but an intense focus of interest.

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"He works for the welfare of *la raza*," *la plebe* will say, even while it disagrees.

It follows that the group which is most respected and admired in the *colonia* is noted for its decided command of American ways. That constitutes part of its usefulness. It constantly acts as a liaison with the other part of town and is the spearhead for further advance of the total group. Its members speak good English and are assured in their contacts with Anglo-Americans. They are alert to recognize rights and stand on them. Individuals in this group have Anglo-American friends; their houses and their ways of life reflect casual familiarity with and acceptance of American custom. To lead, one should be somewhat familiar with the territory. Even Juan Pérez recognizes this when he says, "Those big men know things we had no chance to learn. Sometimes we say they are setting themselves up to grow away from us, trying to change the color of their eyes to blue. But when a big man takes an interest and helps the rest, we know he could not do it unless he had learned your ways." The fact that the "big men" express the wish to combine "the best of both ways," and demonstrate this wish by the continued incorporation in their lives of many Mexican culture traits, is a constant reassurance to their followers.

The standards of the *colonia*, with some slight exceptions, are those which tend to pull the whole group forward toward participation in American life, while keeping its self-respect in its origins intact. Every success and gain for the group increases the attraction of these standards, makes them seem valid to the young and acceptable to the old. More persons climb toward the top group, or set about getting there. There is less disorganization at the top—fewer Maldonados and more Cernas. Youngsters in school fall into line with the pattern and feel the pull toward a goal. "I can tell you when I decided to finish high school," said a boy. "It was when Mr. M— spoke at the Junior College. I felt that it was good to be Mexican, and that our people could achieve, too." "I felt my feet under me," another youngster said, of this same address. The pull of the goal is felt all down the line. A middle-aged laborer, living in a shack on a dusty street, will say, "Our people are going somewhere," and he will talk of

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plans for his children. The plans may be limited and humble enough, but not so much so as they were five years ago. Even the lowest level, the bottom disorganized fringe, is dimly aware of the pull from above. The force exerted is like that of a giant magnet. Individuals and groups align themselves, spring into new positions, accept new attitudes.

But there is polarity in the *colonia*. An alternate magnet exists, pulling the other way, backward and downward. You can hear expressions of its attraction among the lower disorganized fringe. "Why finish high school? You're going to pick fruit like the rest of the *cholos*."¹¹ "The old ways are the best." "There's a law Mexicans can't go there." "Those *señores grandes* just get themselves in trouble." "You can't *carruchar*¹² *la raza*." "I go my own way." "*Me cáen peseta*"¹³ these big shots." "I saw him, *el ocicón*,¹⁴ with those Americans." "He who keeps quiet does not get into trouble." "*Que gachos*"¹⁵ those would-be Americans!" "Mexicans can't get jobs, anyway." Here is the drag of old unworkable patterns from Mexico, of introverted group pride, of economic hopelessness, of the vicious and shoddy in American life, of apathy, sullenness, and recklessness. Nothing is worth while, nothing matters, nothing lies ahead. In such a climate of opinion, the flashy *pachuco* or his adult counterpart becomes an object of admiration. Tolerance of individual behavior becomes indifference to all moral codes. The desire for money, arrived at the easy way, seems the only American trait worth possession. Latin-American patterns are exaggerated and distorted, into a shoddy virility or a touch-me-not "honor." It is the house of Don Nadie, where nothing, or very little, matters.¹⁶

The disorganized fringe is not a static group. It may be large or small, depending upon circumstances beyond colony control. Depression and unemployment increase it tremendously. So does

¹¹ *cholos*: slang for immigrants from Mexico.

¹² *carruchar*: slang, meaning to lift by main force.

¹³ "*Me cáen peseta*": slang, meaning "I can't stand them" or "They disgust me."

¹⁴ *el ocicón*: slang, somewhat equivalent to blabber-mouth.

¹⁵ *Que gacho*: slang, meaning how ugly or how displeasing, in a highly derivative vein.

¹⁶ The reference is to the Spanish *refrán* about the house of Sir Nobody, where nobody knew anything and nothing made any difference.

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a repressive civic policy on the part of the larger community. Lost or discredited leadership within the *colonia* may play its part. Anything which decreases the pull at the top allows the level of disorganization to rise. You can almost watch individuals, families, and groups dropping off into the disorganized fringes. Even those who manage to maintain a sort of equilibrium lose zest. Direction is not clear—there seems to be no goal ahead.

Thus, while standards and group formations in the *colonia* are not directly imitative of dominant Descanso, they are peculiarly dependent upon the larger community. By the degree of opportunity for participation in American life, the *colonia's* standards are pulled one way or the other. When the way is open at the top for successful fusion with the dominant community—when a Juan Pérez, watching, can see demonstrations of this success—then the *colonia's* society is orderly, pulled upward by the standards of its "big people." When the lid is slammed down tight, disorganization boils within. When the lid is only partially and grudgingly lifted, some of the accumulated disorganization may boil over into the greater community.

The history of the so-called *pachuco* groups well illustrates this process. During the depression, judging from all accounts and observations, disorganization was at a high level in the *colonia*. It was, however, an inward disorganization, not apparent at a casual glance; it was like the pathology which begins almost unobserved before it exhibits itself in acute symptoms. Increased employment opportunities which came as a result of war were not immediately available to Americans of Mexican extraction, but opportunities to donate lives were. Appeals to patriotism were made and friendship with Latin America was emphasized, while industrial placement and certain civic privileges were withheld from the American of Latin extraction. The lid was partly off, in the form of an opportunity to die for one's country, but the rest of it was on.

It was precisely at this juncture that *pachuco* activities began to gain prominence. Actually, delinquency did not increase greatly among Mexican-American youth. It simply took some bolder forms, which were blown up by press and police to the

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proportions of a crime wave. Contrary to popular impression, *pachucos* were never organized. They were just boys who hung around street corners and formed shifting, informal allegiances. At the height of the *pachuco* jitters, Descanso's *colonia* never had more than twenty-five boys who might be considered confirmed in anti-social activities, and they more often fought among themselves than elsewhere. Today, it would be hard to find ten or twelve of this persuasion, although many more boys wear "drapes" and get into occasional difficulties with the law.

Descanso likes to think that all the "really bad" boys were drafted and so reformed. The important question is why they were not replaced by their younger admirers. The boys who were eleven and twelve in 1942 and 1943 were, many times, enthralled by their tough big brothers. Why are they not emulating them now, in increasing numbers? Dominant Descanso has done nothing to improve recreational outlets of a wholesome nature for the *colonia*; the whole recreational problem was, during the war, complicated by throngs of servicemen inclined to consider a "foreign" section of a city a sphere for hell-raising. Police enforcement, even of a routine, repressive nature, has been hampered by lack of personnel. Still, *pachucos* are going out of fashion. Even the local press has a hard time raising a good "zoot suit" scare.

The boys who are now gang age have their attention directed elsewhere, not as well as it could be, but sufficiently to make a marked difference in attitude. They have seen Americans of Mexican extraction employed at fair jobs with fair wages. They have seen one or two barriers toppled by legal action. They can see several of their number going on to college. They have read the long list of citations for those with Spanish names. They can make their own fumbling, adolescent plans. The lid is off more. Little Chuey Garcés may never go to college, or get a citation, or even swim in the public pool recently opened to Mexican-Americans. But the fact that these things are open to his group pulls Chuey upward. Slam the lid down, and Chuey will feel the concussion, even though it is indirect.

The great responsibility of the dominant community lies in the fact that it is like a moon, which pulls the tides of the

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colonia's society this way and that. The most enlightened leadership and the most arduous individual efforts cannot prevail, except in individual and isolated instances, against the forces that arise from without. It is far more correct to say that those forces determine, for the group as a whole, what the quality of leadership and the intensity of individual effort shall be. The responsible, even slightly old-fashioned standards by which the *colonia* attempts to grade its classes are in constant jeopardy from the ground swell of shoddier, slicker philosophies. Both forces come, in major part, from the American scene. If the bases of judgment of the "decent people" have a flavor of the nineteenth century, at its best, the phrases on the lips of the disorganized fringe echo a morality where ends are more important than means. "A good racket." "It's what you get by with that counts." "Let somebody else take the rap." You can hear them, not merely among the *colonia's* *cualquieras*, but in Descanso's city hall any day.

Man in Motion

Not only is there motion in the *colonia's* society, in the sense of shifts in organization and disorganization, but there is movement between its two classes. Dominant Descanso is fond of seizing with glee on any admission that class differences exist in the *colonia*. A public official, who had heard an appeal for recreational facilities by one of the *colonia's* leaders, was impressed by only one point. "He said most of them were just peons," the official gloated, "and I'll bet he feels superior to the whole lot of them." Inasmuch as the question under discussion was that of *public* recreation, the consideration of who felt superior to whom was not particularly germane. The gentleman making the address, however, had carefully pointed out that exploitation in the United States had held back the immigrant Mexican as much as any experienced in Mexico; his attitude toward his less fortunate countrymen had been one of understanding and sympathy.

This effort to cut the Mexican-American of superior background or achievement off from the rest of his group is constant in most Anglo-American circles. He is labeled "old Spanish" or "high type" and presumed to be out of sympathy with the mass.

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To the discredit of some leaders, it must be said that they still bite on this old hook, but it is a mark of the sound leadership just emerging that the bait is repudiated instantly.

Actually, there is a surprising amount of vertical mobility in the *colonia*. The fixed grades and classes which must have been brought from Mexico are disappearing. This fluidity is all the more noteworthy because the outlet at the top has been so limited. The result has been, of course, to increase the numbers in the upper class of the *colonia*.

The old ladies still talk about *los decentes* and *los cualesquieras*, or *los correctos*¹⁷ and *los tontos*,¹⁸ as though a sharp and immutable line of distinction existed. In Mexico, *los decentes* or *correctos* were the genteel—those of good family, fair income, nice manners, and store clothes. *Los cualesquieras* or *tontos* were the folk people. Once a *cualquiera*, always a *cualquiera*, say the old ladies—that is part of having a nice neat society, with the ranks all fixed. “But what about Señor So-and-so, whose father was a ranch worker? He has done well—he is considered one of the big men.” “But he is an exception,” say the old ladies, serenely. “Or *la señora Q*—? Her parents, I understand, were very common people.” It develops that *la señora Q*— is also an exception. After a half hour of this, the ranks of society sound pretty well mixed up.

“I have no friends here,” complained a woman, originally from the *gente decente*¹⁹ in Mexico. “There are no people of my own rank. There is simply no one for me to associate with.” When Mrs. B— returned from a short trip, the steady stream of visitors to her house belied her friendlessness. The B— daughter is going to marry a nice young man who is the son of an immigrant track worker. His relatives, together with the B— family, are in the thick of wedding preparations. Mrs. B— may be eating her heart out, but it is not in loneliness.

It gives the old ladies or a woman like Mrs. B— a distinct jolt to meet, in the best colony circles, a young person of achievement who will say blithely, “Of course, my father was a man of

¹⁷ *los correctos*: the people who do things properly.

¹⁸ *los tontos*: the ignorant people.

¹⁹ *gente decente*: genteel people, equivalent to *los decentes*.

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little education" or "I came from one of these poor homes" or "I was just an ordinary Mexican kid." The ranks of society get all mixed up, again. The old ladies and Mrs. B— are due for a series of shocks, in the years to come. Out of those young people of high school and college age who demonstrate potential leadership, *not one* comes from a home which could be classified as *gente decente* in origin. Out of a slightly older group of potential leaders, only four came from such homes—the majority reflected backgrounds like that of the Cerna family. Out of potential leaders recently in the armed service, only two can lay claim to *gente decente* origin. The present leadership of the *colonia* claims several men of middle-class origin in Mexico, but all of those men underwent a drop in status for several years after coming to the United States. Out of the experience of digging ditches, working in mines, sweeping streets, or peddling wares house-to-house, they have gained a vivid realization of what immigrant experience means.

More than the old ladies realize, status in Descanso's *colonia* is determined by what one does and not by what one's family was. A good family, in the sense of a self-respecting, well-behaved one, is an important asset. Beyond that, few inquiries are made. Even the term *cualquiera* has been twisted so that it applies to conduct and not to origins. To Lola Pérez, a family like that of Cuca Garcés are "anybodies"; to Linda Cerna, the Maldonados are "anybodies." But Mrs. Cerna will call the Pérez family a good, *decent* family, using "decent" in its literal English sense. With less and less defensiveness, the younger members of the *colonia* admit frankly that their parents were humble in origin and occupation—they are coming to make these statements with pride.

It may be one of the good things in the American scene which is being assimilated. For these statements sound not unlike the frank admissions of dominant Descanso that its forebears curried mules, peddled shoelaces, or used a pick. The new spirit is closer to that of a pioneer society. In a sense the *colonia* is pioneering its way toward full participation in American life. The man who stands out in such an endeavor is the one who will perform when the chips are down—in Descanso's own phrase—regardless of origins.

CHAPTER VII

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Leadership

THE *colonia*, however, is a long, weary way from full participation. For the most part, it is thrown back upon itself. In the little world which exists west of the tracks and east of the wash, it has had to develop its own organizations and social life. Some models for these existed in Mexico; others have been acquired through brief glimpses into the life of dominant Descanso. It is not surprising that structures erected on these models had many lacks, that they broke down on trial, or even blew up in the face of the apprentice inventor. The perpetual scarcity, the crying need, of the *colonia* has always been for intelligent and experienced leadership. For the potential leader, there was no place to learn except among the half-formed, amateur endeavors within the *colonia*. He had to climb upon wreckage, both his and that of others.

The community is still peculiarly dependent on its leaders, and comparatively helpless without good ones. Even during the war, with the additional impetus given by better jobs and more pay, little forward progress would have been made if three or four men had been removed from the picture. They were the magnets which drew the scattered community forces into sharp outlines. Direction and purpose flowed from them, leavening the inertia and apathy of *la plebe*. A typically Mexican pattern, someone will say. But foreign observers have pointed out that it is a pattern typical of the United States, that we glorify individual leadership and relegate mass participation to a stamp on a voter's ballot every four years. The pattern may be, as the *colonia* puts it, "one of those things we learned from you people." But,

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wherever the pattern originated, the *colonia* is certainly inclined to put its hopes of progress in the hands of a few men.

In the past, those hands might not have been trustworthy ones. If you will remember, Juan Pérez's first impetus to progress came from a personage known, with some reason, as a *coyote*. This *coyote* was succeeded by other *coyotes*, in the form of picking-crew bosses, small labor contractors, intermediaries of various sorts with the American scene. "Whenever I wanted a bunch of Mexican workers," an elderly American contractor said, "I'd just drive down past Sixth and Monticello, and there would be a couple of these guys leaning against the wall. 'How many?' they'd say when they saw me. I'd tell them, and name my own price. And I got the Mex at my own price." The *coyote* no doubt served a purpose, but it was not a very noble one. If he is gone today, recent full employment did it, because he was still in evidence during the depression of the thirties.

The *coyote* had his counterpart in the *explotador*. The exploiter was usually a small businessman, a Mexican. The neighborhood grocery store was his favorite lair, but he might also be builder and owner of cheap housing, on the *vecindad*¹ pattern. Or he might be the professional gambler who followed the crops like a buzzard, or who lay in wait in an alley hide-out for Santa Fe payday. Whatever he was, his object was the milking of his own group of all they could stand without going dry. I have seen, during the depths of the depression, a grocery *explotador* calmly add five or six dollars to the weekly debt of families who were trying to live on \$48 a month. I have no doubt that he finally collected every cent, by threatening attachment of cars and other possessions. It must be emphasized that not every neighborhood grocery contained an *explotador*, by any means. There were many small merchants who imperiled themselves, many times, to help their poor customers, and who sold for the fairest prices they could manage. But the unscrupulous man, by his very financial power, collected influence. People went to him for loans and favors, because he could give them—for advice, because of his seeming success.

¹ *vecindad*: housing for several families, built in an arcade around a court, after the model prevalent in poor districts of Mexican cities.

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Sometimes the *explotador* had furtive and indirect connections with law-enforcement agencies. He could "fix" things—sometimes. At least he could pretend to and so involve the helpless further. Rumors about jobs, or ways of getting relief, or activities of the immigration officers flowed through him. His was leadership, of a sort, although it often led into blind alleys and further distress. Many times, it was the only leadership a Mexican colony had.

When I first knew Descanso's *colonia*, eight years ago, it had considerable leadership of this type. But it also had much of the enlightened and altruistic sort. It is a tribute to the progress the *colonia* has made that the latter type is now in the ascendancy. The *explotadores* are by no means all gone, but they do not wield the influence they used to. *La plebe* has something better upon which it can rely. That it has is due to the efforts of a few men who could keep the ideal of group gain above that of individual gain, greatly as they were tempted toward the latter from time to time.

With the passing of the *explotador* is also going what might be known as accommodating leadership—that is, the type of leadership which accommodates the dominant group at the expense of its own self-respect. The *explotador* was often a Mexican version of Uncle Tom. In his best clothes, face-to-face with the Anglo-American world, he was a great apologist for "my people." "My people are so backward, you can't expect much of them," was his theme. "He's just a dumb Mexican," was a favorite defense for a client involved with the law. "These poor, ignorant people, they don't know how to bring up their kids," he said to the teacher. He was careful never to say a word of equal rights and opportunity for his group, or of injustice and discrimination against them. In defense of himself, he would say that you never got anywhere, that you just antagonized those Americans, by bringing up such subjects.

In certain times and places, he may have had a point. The history of the Negro minority demonstrates that, where the dominant hand is heavy, accommodating leadership is the only kind possible—for the simple reason that any other sort would be killed, literally. But dominance of the Mexican and Mexican-American has seldom been this cruel; there has been far less

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excuse for accommodating leadership continued so long. There are far too many educated and able Mexican-Americans, in the Southwest, who tune up the old theme of "my people are so backward," when faced with a microphone or an Anglo-American audience. It is a pitfall which the best seem to have difficulty evading, at times.

Descanso's *colonia* is fortunate in having a few men who can deliver a protest—tactfully and winningly, perhaps, but still firmly. "If our people seem backward," they can say, "it is because they have been held back and shut off from opportunity. Take off the blinders and the hobbles, and see whether we are backward or not!" Their influence on young, potential leaders is sound. Able boys are learning that it is possible to stand on one's pride and self-respect and demand rights—not with apologetic subservience or emotional outbursts, but quietly, consistently, firmly. For the leadership in Descanso's *colonia* is essentially conservative, in that it believes in making use of the law, the polls, and the appeal to American ideals in pressing its cause. Sometimes it is naively conservative, as when it puts too much faith in the valid intentions of "big men" among the Anglo-American group. It still has too much hope of the patron, the influential Anglo-American who will make everything easy, and it is inclined to select patrons with misguided innocence. At these times, the old patterns of accommodating leadership begin to smother the new self-respect.

Probably the prestige fights which mar the *colonia's* leadership have their origin in a mutual suspicion of opportunism. It is possible to get two or three of the colony leaders to pull in harness together, but seldom five or six, for very long. Sooner or later the air is murky with accusations of "*explotador*" or "opportunist." This one is accused of using the cloak of group betterment to advance his own interests, that one of selling out for status or opportunity with Anglo-Americans. More often than not, the accusations have no base, or only a slight one. But so long and weary has been the record of venal and self-seeking leadership, not only in the *colonia*, but elsewhere among Mexican-Americans, that it is perhaps inevitable such charges be made.

At least, the prestige fights serve as a testing ground for hon-

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esty in leadership. They pull the personally ambitious man back into line. For it is increasingly clear that leadership is going to have to be "straight." The best men in the *colonia* exemplify it; it is chapter, verse, and text to the youngsters rising to leadership. There may be failures—even a good man succumbs to temptation—but the direction is clear. There are even some signs that a second essential lesson is being learned: leadership for a minority cannot be a *prima donna* performance. The able man in the *colonia* has been too ready to gather into his hands *all* the authority. He has wanted his finger in every pie, regardless of duplication of effort. The stumblings of his less able colleagues have irritated him. He has balked from delegation of authority, as well as from the painful business of working with the less competent, or those of slightly different views—drawing out their strengths and overlooking their weaknesses. If these things are learned, the great present problem of Mexican-American leadership—consolidation and harmony of effort—will be on its way to solution.

The absence of young men in military service tended to concentrate leadership in the hands of the middle-aged, in Descanso's *colonia* as elsewhere. This older leadership has been remarkably progressive, all things considered. But the contribution which those in their twenties and thirties will soon be able to make was emphasized by the courageous soundness of one or two younger leaders remaining. Such younger leadership will rest upon a broader base than the old. The men prominent in the *colonia's* affairs today are, for the most part, Mexican-born of *gente decente* background. They make an effort to overcome class difference, but a certain remoteness remains. The younger leaders, however, both those who were away and those still in school, came from all types of homes in the *colonia*—the greater number of them from families of the Juan Pérez type. Their closeness to the mass of their group, combined with their genuine desire to be of service to it, augurs well for future direction of Mexican-American efforts.

A second gap in leadership lies in the sphere of feminine participation. Women, on the whole, cannot be stirred from their round of home interests. The whole Latin family pattern not

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only reinforces this limitation of interest, but makes it probable that women's contributions will be greeted, by men in the group, with a certain patriarchal dominance. Women are likely to be asked to put on dinners to raise money, or to feed fatigued males after their weighty deliberations; but, so far, no one has suggested that they serve on committees. A few male leaders have recognized that this is a lack and attempted to overcome it. The women, themselves, however, are shy about responding. They seem to feel that they are more secure in the traditional roles. A few wives share their husbands' interests in group welfare, enthusiastically if vicariously; a still smaller group will occasionally work registering voters, selling War Bonds, or supervising a young people's gathering.

While the very real demands of caring for good-sized families are certainly a limiting factor in women's participation, the more "modern" women realize that their influence, carried beyond the home, would have weight. Of a Mexican colony in a neighboring town, where some feminine leadership has developed, they say: "Those people in Socorro are progressive. Look at that Mrs. C—. She has done more for the South End there than anyone. Anglos will listen to her when she speaks in the Co-ordinating Council. A woman like that, who is a good wife and a good mother, can say things to the Anglos our men cannot. When she wants a playground for children, she gets it." Among the younger, unmarried women, particularly those who are alumnae of the Protestant settlement house, with its training in group work, some good potential leadership exists. As yet, the *colonia* offers no outlet for it.

It has been interesting to observe, in Descanso and elsewhere, the role of the Protestant settlement house in developing youthful leaders. On the surface, the Protestant settlement houses seem to stand apart from the Mexican colony. They are not generally accepted and they are under continual fire from the parish priest. The ignorant and backward members of the *colonia* act as if they expected to see cloven hooves going in and out the settlement house door. The settlement houses are criticized as "*alcahuete*-houses" because they permit communal recreation of boys and girls. They make comparatively few converts. Their approach can

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often be characterized as both sentimental and limited, even as grimly puritanical. Their leaders expect to make up in good intentions what they lack in training; often, their understanding of Mexican cultural patterns is one-sided or woefully incomplete.

Yet they have filled an important and indispensable place in the upward progress of Mexican-Americans, particularly those of the second generation. Sincerity and an obvious desire to serve have overcome many handicaps. The settlement house has never reached the bulk of Mexican-American youth, nor even those who need recreational outlets most. It is no answer, in itself, to the problem of the adolescent in the *colonia*. But it has attracted potential leaders and developed them. At a Mexican-American youth conference held in Descanso's Junior College, it was notable that the outstanding persons, both young and old, were settlement house alumni. The same picture has been noted in other cities; of the Americans of Mexican descent rising in educational work, government employment, and social work, a large percentage have used the Protestant settlement house as a spring-board.

Many never become Protestants; they remain nominal Catholics or have no special religious attachment. The value of the settlement house lies in its introduction of the young to a cultural by-product of Protestantism: the idea that life is rewarded in this world, by the fruits of industry, sobriety, and thrift, in the tangible form of success. As this is a cherished concept in American life, its introduction can scarcely come too soon. It may have some unrealistic aspects, for the disadvantaged, but it does provide impetus and hope. The willingness of the Protestant institutions to reinforce the concept by very practical assistance in obtaining scholarships, part-time work, and other aids to education has its effect, too. Hope is not only held out, but steps are taken to implement it.

Whether the Protestant settlement will continue to serve as a halfway house to achievement is difficult to predict. Of more importance, perhaps, is the fact that the Catholic parish hall does not serve in this capacity. It does not often serve as the breeding-ground of progressive movement among the elder. The leaders of Descanso's *colonia* are distinguished by the fact that their di-

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vorcement from the Church is total or partial, in spite of their frequent careful inclusion of the parish priest—who, to do him credit, tries hard to go along with forward advances.

The Institution

It is perhaps surprising that, in discussing a population originating in a predominantly Catholic country, so little has been said about the Church. It has been pointed out that Juan Pérez was a religious man, given to personalizing his deities; his religion also included considerable anti-clericalism, perhaps brought on by such things as the necessity for *casamiento del tiempo de Porfirio*. The central plateau regions of Mexico, from which immigration to the United States came, was the most solidly and intensely Catholic part of Mexico. The secular power of the Church—that alliance of political, economic, and religious force which distinguishes Catholicism in many Latin countries—was strong here, as many clerical counter-revolutions can attest.

It is not surprising that clericalism should have followed the Mexican immigrant to the United States, inasmuch as many of his parish churches are staffed, and continue to be, by Mexican-born and -trained priests. Neither is it remarkable that such guidance should tend to hold the group back from acculturation into American life. What is remarkable is that religious feeling should have waned so in intensity, lost its living core, and become, at best, a routine function.

An overwhelming majority of the *colonia's* population say they are Catholic. They are baptized, married, and buried with Catholic rites. The number of individuals who are Protestant is tiny, the number of Protestant families infinitesimal. But, out of the number of nominal Catholics, the proportion who attend church regularly, participate in its sacraments, and make religion a part of their daily lives is small indeed. Their numbers comprise chiefly older women and young children still under a mother's guidance. The male of all ages, except the advanced, is likely to be indifferent; adolescents and young adults of both sexes are not far behind.

Still, few would ever relinquish this token bond to the Church.

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It is this tenuous affiliation the parish priest has in mind when he says that "all Mexicans are Catholics—they were all baptized in the Church." To be sure the bond does not loosen, this otherwise kindly man feels obliged to wage petty and ignoble warfare against the Protestant settlement house and other character-building agencies which might have any hint of Protestantism. Threats of refusal of confessional privileges to parents are among the ammunition in his arsenal, but they are threats which he does not dare carry out.

It is hard to chart the exact influence of the Catholic Church in the *colonia*. Sometimes it seems to have no influence; it is ignored, even flouted. Remarks that "all priests are wolves" circulate freely, as do a hundred *dichos*² and *refrânes* of an uncomfortably realistic nature. Most of the young people who have become converts to Protestantism have encountered no great opposition in their Catholic homes. Thousands of exhortations and warnings, delivered with heavy solemnity in sermons and on pastoral visits, are quietly shrugged off. The most admired and influential man in the colony is non-Catholic, and divorced and remarried, to boot. Another outstanding and respected man is a frank, effective critic of the Church.

Then, unexpectedly, the influence of the Church will show. Let a parish priest take a stand against public housing, unionization, day nurseries, anti-venereal publicity, or any one of a hundred similar issues—one can almost see the *colonia*, in majority, swing in agreement with him. It is significant that his stand is effective only when it concerns the new and the untried. He could not take a stand against public schooling if he wished to, although, in Mexico, such a stand is still effective. If he wanted to lose an entire feminine congregation, he might talk about the evils of beauty parlors. But, if he speaks of the innovation, the little understood matter, he has an audience; decisions will be made on the basis of his judgment. It is unfortunate that the parish priest is so often against, not only the outright novelty, but many matters which would hasten the assimilation of his flock.

² *dicho*: a saying, somewhat briefer than a *refrán*, or proverb.

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How could he be otherwise? Born in Mexico, reared in a nation where the Church is a powerful secular force, imperfectly assimilated into American life himself—how could he be expected to lead where he hardly knows his own way? Even the American-born priest of Irish or German extraction is likely to labor under the impression that things in a Mexican parish must be conducted differently—more the way they are in Mexico. Throughout the Southwest, one is likely to get the impression that there are two Catholic Churches operating, and that the one for Mexican-Americans is closer to the Mexican pattern, duplicating many of its weaknesses.

If it is difficult to observe the record of the Catholic Church in Mexico with any admiration, one thing at least may be said. Here and there, it produced a truly good man, in the person of the parish priest laboring with abnegation and sincerity for his people. Whatever his limitations, his intentions were unquestionable. Descanso's *colonia* has been fortunate in having such a man in its parish house for several years. If one has observed the havoc worked, in other parishes, by avarice, sloth, blind fanaticism, and other major sins, the value of integrity is obvious.

The *padre* of the *colonia* is Mexican-born, and, though a naturalized American citizen, expresses himself with difficulty in English. Of his sincerity and good intentions, his parishioners have no doubt. They are inclined to criticize him for a certain heavy solemnity which pervades all his actions. Even on Easter, traditionally *un día glorioso*,³ they say, he preaches as if it were the middle of Lent. Youngsters feel that his unabating moral earnestness often takes the edge off occasions meant to be purely social or recreational. Still, everyone echoes the opinion that he is a "good man, such a good man." They feel that even those actions which seem domineering, as when he accosts delinquent parishioners who have patronized the cooking classes or the public library branch at the Protestant settlement house, or assails these persons publicly in his sermons, are caused merely by an excess of zeal. His flagellations seem to cause the *padre* as much pain as they do others.

³ *un día glorioso*: a glorious, or heavenly, day.

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One of the things which Juan Pérez missed when he came to the United States was the community social life which followed the round of the Church calendar. The festal dates, some of them dating from a pre-Conquest religion, were closely tied to the seasonal agricultural cycle and tied yet again to the particular region, in that the special saints of the city, the locality, and the *barrio* were feted. Religious observance was inextricably intertwined with attachment to the *tierra* and with the rural subsistence economy. Many of these activities could, and did, go on without the assistance of a priest. They were religious in name, but in substance often approached more nearly such secular recreation as community pageants or community processions. One of the most distinctive and important phases of the life of a small Mexican community, they compensated, in Juan Pérez's mind, for many other failures of the Church.

In the small Catholic parish in the United States, the immigrant found nothing to replace the old community life. It would have been impossible to transplant—it was too closely tied to the activities and association of a region. But, for many years, nothing which even remotely took its place existed in the Mexican-American parish. The instruction of the young in the catechism, the administration of sacraments, and the erection of a large, fine church structure were the goals of most parish priests. Few attempts were made to provide recreational outlets for the community under the sponsorship of the parish church, or to center the life of a Mexican colony around it. An opportunity for a tremendously effective piece of work certainly existed. That the opportunity was not realized may account for some of the indifference of the *colonia's* nominal Catholics.

The *colonia's* *padre* has bestirred himself, in the last few years, to provide services for drawing the community. The more malicious comment that "He's scared—he's trying to imitate the settlement house," but a majority feel that the *padre* is honestly trying to give his people what they need. He has had intelligent assistance from visiting missionary fathers, usually representative of the more alert and progressive wing of Catholicism. These are young men, on the whole, Anglo-American in origin and the products of experience in group work in urban centers. The

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public clinic for children, conducted by a missionary sisterhood, has been a successful innovation. The city nurses give it credit for popularizing the idea of diphtheria and smallpox inoculation in quarters where no one else had been able to. The boys' clubs have not been so successful; lack of equipment and unimaginative techniques handicap them. David Pérez's comment that they are attended only by those who have to go, because they are on probation to the priest, is not far from the truth. The *jamaicas* (charity fairs) and church plays have to run heavy competition with the movies, but they do provide recreation for those families whose girls would otherwise be immured behind the family picket fence, with small chance of meeting any young male except a cousin.

The *padre's* boldest and perhaps most successful venture, from the point of view of allying himself with progressive forces, was his sponsorship of a committee formed in the *colonia* to fight discrimination through legal channels. The parish hall was opened for organization meetings; the *padre* was a member of the committee and entered into the legal action on the important case, that of establishing the right of American citizens of Mexican descent to use Descanso's public plunge. The success of the committee in raising funds for expensive legal action can probably be credited, in great part, to the *padre's* standing and influence. Similarly, he has been sympathetic to efforts to secure greater voting participation in civic affairs on the part of the *colonia*. The unpaved streets, poor sewerage, and bad lighting of that section of a ward which comprises the *colonia* are a source of distress to him; he would like that distress communicated by its residents to their councilman in unmistakable fashion.

The greatest problem of all among his parishioners remains unsolved. It is the defection of the young adults. It is not so much that they embrace other religions, but that they do not concern themselves with the one they have. That this is a problem common to all churches, Catholic or Protestant, in the United States is small consolation. The Catholic Church knows, better than any other, that, if the coming generations are lost, all is lost. In the *colonia*, there is an added sting in the fact that the most able and promising youngsters leave the *colonia* for achievement

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elsewhere under the aegis of the Protestant settlement house. The *padre* has not yet solved the problem of developing youthful leadership. His recalcitrant youthful Catholics are likely to suggest that less domination, less enforced control, more imaginative guidance toward assimilation with American life, and more practical aids in accomplishing this assimilation might help in the solution.

Associations

Most of the social life of the *colonia* is essentially informal in nature. The street corner, the washing line in the back yard, the repair of an old car, and the corner *tienda* (as well as the corner *cantina*) are the meeting-places of many a "club," if a group of people who habitually drift together in a casual fashion can be so termed. *La plebe* snatches conversation, fun, and refreshment in the course of work and routine errands, in this fashion. People gather together, converse, drift apart, and gather again, without discernible aim or purpose but still with the sureness of habit. Monticello Avenue, after work hours or on holidays, has the look of a community that is celebrating something. People dress up, walk leisurely, stop to talk in groups, to watch and comment on others—all as if this activity had its own importance. To dominant Descanso, this loitering on the streets is another evidence of lack of purpose. "They're always standing around doing nothing," it says of the *colonia's* residents. To persons familiar with Latin America, it looks like the pattern of the *paseo*, common both to large cities and little places like Los Conejos—the relaxing stroll by which one sees and is seen, communicates with one's friends, and picks up news of the day's doings. To more widely experienced observers, it looks like a pattern of village behavior anywhere.

There is, of course, more to social life in the *colonia* than this. For families like Juan Pérez's, it may mean a series of extended family gatherings, like the ones which make David Pérez feel that the family is "all right." If you ask a person like Lola Pérez who her friends are, she will very likely say, "I have no friends." Do not thereby be misled into thinking that hers is a life of loneli-

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ness and isolation. She will probably add, "Just my *parientes*."⁴ To admit that you have only relatives for friends is a mark of social failure in our society, but for families like those of Lola Pérez, it is a mark of success. *Parientes* include persons of many varying degrees of relationship, not only aunts, uncles, grandparents, nieces, nephews, and cousins, but their relatives by marriage and the various godparents that appertain to the whole group. It is perfectly possible to have a christening or wedding party of a hundred persons, all of whom will be related in some fashion.

This network of relationships constitutes one of the strengths of the Latin-American family. Even poverty and migrancy have not been able to destroy it in the *colonia*. Only the seriously disorganized families have lost it. It does not fulfill the same function of mutual aid that it did in Mexico—many of the traditional functions of the *padrinos*, the godparents, and most of those of the *consuegros*, the parents-in-law, have been lost. Its chief strength remains in those gatherings which celebrate the great crises of life: birth, marriage, and death. For economic crises, in a community where there are no food-bins to be shared, the state or the county has come to be the *madrina*, as the *colonia* points out. In the realm of personal relationships, however, the extended family is strong. It is not going too far to say that people cling to their nominal Catholicism simply because it is associated with the celebration of crisis rites and the acquisition of an enlarged number of *parientes*, like *padrinos* and *consuegros*. The life of an *aleluya*⁵ can be very lonely, by contrast. "No wonder these *aleluyas* sing so many hymns," the *colonia* says. "They have to keep their spirits up."

The disorganized fringes of the *colonia* are almost the only circles in which the extended family pattern is absent. The Maldonados say, American-fashion, that they do not want "a lot of relatives always poking their noses into things." The Garcés family simply cannot find many persons who want to be *padrinos* or *consuegros* with them; if such persons are found, they are always moving away, falling ill, getting "in trouble," or in gen-

⁴ *parientes*: relatives.

⁵ *aleluya*: slang term for a convert to Protestantism.

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eral being subject to the hazards of poverty and ignorance. But Linda Cerna and her friends put emphasis on extended relationships; not only are they "nice for the children," but everyone feels more "content" and "*en casa*"—at home in the world. To the extended family, however, Linda and her circle are adding friendships formed, American style, on the basis of common interests, childhood and school associations, or living in the same neighborhood. A few of these new friends are Americans of descent other than Mexican. The Cernas exchange dinners with Betty and Joe Pratt—Betty used to clerk in the store with Linda. One of the junior high teachers, who wants to learn Spanish, has taken to dropping in occasionally. The old Jenssen couple, who live in the next block, rely on their Mexican neighbors for many kindnesses and reciprocate as well as they can. The Cernas, secretly, would like more Anglo-American friends, as a part of having "the best of both ways," but they seldom have opportunities for making them.

The proliferation of societies, clubs, and associations which distinguishes American life has not yet intruded upon the *colonia*. The Rebekas, Valkyries, Secret Grottos, ladies' auxiliaries, bridge clubs, Elks, Lions, Argonauts, study circles, Wa-ho-mis, Cootie Clubs, Twenty-Thirty Clubs and the hundred and one other groupings whose activities fill the pages of the *Descanso Reporter* do not exist around Monticello Avenue, whose residents still seem to prefer spontaneity. The upper circles of the *colonia* have two organizations which meet in conjunction with Anglo-Americans; both are directed toward the improvement of Spanish and English speech of the membership and "bettering" relationships. The Anglo-American members are chiefly teachers or persons who have lived in Latin countries; the clubs devote themselves to pleasant social evenings and take little cognizance of or interest in serious aspects of the *colonia's* problem.

One merchant on Monticello Avenue is a member of Kiwanis and of the Descanso Chamber of Commerce; another is a member of the Elks. Nothing like a corresponding Kiwanis, Lions' or Rotarians' organization exists within the *colonia*. There is, however, a men's organization which embraces a large membership in the colony and serves some of the purposes which these other

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organizations might. It is the Confederación de Sociedades Mexicanas, the Confederation of Mexican Societies, a council based upon the membership of four mutual insurance groups, co-ordinating their efforts. Developed under the auspices of the local Mexican consul, its membership consists largely of older men who are Mexican nationals, and its outstanding activity is the celebration of the two Mexican national holidays. Its articles of incorporation specifically restrict it from taking part in civic affairs having to do with politics. Other objectives, such as working for the "economic, moral, and cultural improvement of the Mexican people," are somewhat vaguely implemented. The Confederación has raised enough money to purchase two lots in the *colonia* and has a start on a building fund for the erection of a clubhouse, to be used for dances, lectures, and sports events.

The irreverent in the *colonia* dub the organization "La Confederación Santa Fe," because its membership is drawn largely from the ranks of Santa Fe workers. Twenty or thirty men who have higher ratings, such as foreman, accountant, skilled mechanic, or inspector constitute the active membership, among which offices are rotated. This trend, it must be emphasized, is entirely coincidental—the Santa Fe has no connection with the Confederación, nor it with the railroad. The leadership of the Confederación merely emphasizes a growing disposition for those in the *colonia* of similar occupation to cluster together. It is a disposition which may, in time, override extended family ties. Those men in the Confederación who are employed by the new steel company show a like tendency to hang together in a bloc, as does the smaller group of Monticello Avenue merchants.

Because the Confederación cannot participate in anything remotely political, other organizations have arisen to fill the need of political expression. Most of them have had brief, fitful lives. "*Llamarada de petate*,"⁶ the Mexican equivalent for "flash in the pan," can aptly be applied to them. But some of the flashes, especially the more recent ones, have illuminated wide vistas. The Mexican Defense Committee, organized in the summer of 1943, successfully prosecuted the City of Descanso in a federal

⁶ *Llamarada de petate*: a sudden blaze in a straw mat, as if one accidentally dropped a match there.

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court for its refusal to admit Americans of Mexican descent to the civic pool, after all attempts at tactful persuasion had been rebuffed. Manned by the best leadership in the *colonia*, including the *padre*, the committee displayed careful planning, resourcefulness, and perseverance in carrying through its action. By appealing directly to the *colonia*, in the most democratic fashion possible, it succeeded in raising the necessary funds, chiefly by numerous tiny contributions of twenty-five cents to a dollar. Better yet, it took its success soberly. An editorial in the Spanish-language paper, entitled "*El Triunfo y su Responsabilidad*" (The Triumph and Its Responsibility), pointed out that the decision only showed the road to full citizenship—it asked its readers to respond with the "dignity worthy of free men." It might be added that they did. After a summer's use of the pool by all ethnic groups (or at least those who could afford to make the trip to its location in the extreme north end of the city), not one of the "terrible problems" envisaged by the city officials has arisen.

The Defense Committee, however, was left without a cause. (The city council anticipated its next move by passing an ordinance making it illegal to display "White trade only" signs in cafés.) Fewer and fewer persons attended its open meetings. Executive sessions found half the board members busy elsewhere. Finally, it lapsed into dormancy. There were many things it could have done, but none which seemed important to its leaders or to the *colonia* in general, after the great flash of the federal court case.

From the ashes, however, rose the next *llamarada*, the Liga Cívica,⁷ an organization for registering those eligible to vote and encouraging them to do so. A special ward election and the then pending national election gave its activities a push. Headed by one man, a former leader of the committee, it had absolutely no connection with any other national or local groups set up to get out the vote, although, at one point in its career, it was wooed ardently by the Republicans. It did not accomplish all it had set out to do, but it did succeed in augmenting, by a substantial per

⁷ *Liga Cívica*: civic league.

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cent, the active registration of Americans of Mexican descent. The elections over, it quietly died into ashes.

In passing, a wreath should be laid on the ashes of the local chapter of the LULACS (the League of United Latin-American Citizens). This organization, founded in Texas in 1929, has many branches throughout the Southwest. Its object is the Americanization of all Mexicans residing permanently within the United States, encouragement of their use of the vote, and stimulation of the greater learning and use of English. Whatever its success elsewhere, it did not seem to take in Descanso's *colonia*, which apparently needs a crisis to focus its interests. But the brief career of the LULACS was marked by one innovation: a women's auxiliary which participated actively in all of its affairs. Good feminine leadership showed signs of developing; in fact, the women might have kept the LULACS going for some time, had not a certain hazard peculiar to women's organizations materialized on a large scale. As a former member put it, "Almost every one of us got pregnant that winter." The home duties connected with the care of an additional child stopped the auxiliary dead in its tracks.

For the present, the evanescent character of groups like the Defense Committee and the Liga Cívica may suit the *colonia's* needs. They exist when there is something to do. They disappear when the concrete job is finished. At least, they are strictly functional—not floundering along, like many of their Anglo-American counterparts, in a morass of minutes, letter-heads, and empty objectives. There is always the chance that they will come to life when a good objective exists. They may even constitute practice flights for national or regional movements, where focus and realism would be a decided asset.

Too many national and regional organizations have a tendency to get themselves draped in "aims," top-heavy advisory boards, progress reports of millimeter gains, and all the rest of the organizational appurtenances. The forest not only gets lost for the trees, but scarcely a ray of light shows through the luxuriant foliage. A rather appealing little regional organization called the Mexican-American Movement shows signs of getting itself smothered in this efflorescence of organization. Initiated in 1942 by Mexican-Americans in their twenties, chiefly young teachers or Y

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workers, the MAM had as its simple objective that of encouraging young Americans of Mexican descent to get better educations. Operating on a financial shoestring, its leaders struggling with their own vocational problems, half of its personnel drafted out from under it every year, the MAM nevertheless managed to establish numerous branch organizations and to enlist the sponsorship of educators. It is now in the position of needing a few kernels to fill its rather capacious husk. It could well turn its attention to answering the question: "Why finish high school if you can only pick fruit?" Translated into terms of higher education, the question reads: "Why go to college if opportunities for professional placement are limited?" Vocational counseling in the public education system, as applied to minorities, would also profit from attention.

In Descanso, the MAM, under the guidance of the same man who headed the Liga Cívica, has been thrown back to the youth concerned. The youngsters compose its membership and provide its officers. They are supposed to spread the gospel of higher education among their own kind. That they are doing so with some success is marked by the increased enrollment of Americans of Mexican descent at Descanso's Junior College. Some attempt has been made to provide an answer to the question of placement by seeking contacts of individual youths with individual employers. To this extent, the organization in Descanso tries to be realistic.

It has been pointed out that the Catholic Church has no strong subsidiary organizations in the *colonia* and that those connected with the Protestant settlement house reach only a fraction of the *colonia's* residents. The altar society of the Catholic church, La Santísima, is composed of devout, elderly women who live near the church and confine their activities to dusting and decorating its altars. The Sodality of Our Lady of Lourdes has a somewhat larger membership, including twenty young girls. Group "hen" parties provide them some approved social outlets, but it cannot be said that the influence of the sodality is wide or that it attempts any solutions of adolescent problems.

It has been suggested that the slight formal organization existing in the *colonia* may be in some respects an advantage. It differs strikingly from the picture presented by the Negro minority,

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whose complications of clubs and associations exceed even those of the United States at large. The situation in the *colonia* makes for greater fluidity and adaptability. The feeling that an organization should not exist unless it has a definite job to do is in many ways a protection. It leaves the field open until objectives are crystallized. It keeps at a minimum competition and prestige fights, both of which show a deplorable tendency to flourish in existing organizations. If the organizational vacuum in the *colonia* is eventually filled by one or two well-oriented, democratic associations, the delay in achieving them will have been well worth while. If, however, the present situation is protracted too long and degenerates into amorphousness and vacillation, the dangers are obvious. The other side of town is impressed by organization. The activities of the Defense Committee and the Liga Cívica left an impression, out of all proportions to their scope, in the minds of public officials in Descanso. Several restrictive measures, including a curfew law whose enforcement was intended to be frankly discriminatory, have been nipped in the bud as a result. "You have to be careful with the West End now," officials will say. "They're organizing, they're getting out the vote, they know how to hire a good attorney and fight."

Communication

Descanso's *colonia* has both time on the local radio and its own press. Of the radio hours, only two things need to be said. The first is that they are on the air at a time when practically no one except a few sleepy housewives is listening. The second is that the programs, like those of all "Spanish hours" in the locality, are merely Hispanized versions of American commercials. You can hear about soap, patent medicines, friendly credit, and bargain sales every fifteen minutes, if you prefer to hear it in Spanish. The interspersed recordings have the advantage of being, musically, more pleasing than swing! Jorge Negrete and Agustín Lara are at least soothing; some of the *ranchero* songs constitute really good folk music. But, to anything which would constitute a message, or guidance and education, for listeners, the "Spanish hours" make no pretense.

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The Spanish language weekly which is published in Descanso is a different matter. It makes an honest effort to present national and international news from a sound, progressive angle; in this respect, it makes more rewarding reading than the *Descanso Reporter*, many a time. Its cause, the removal of discrimination against the Mexican-American minority, is prosecuted courageously, but without resort to rabble-rousing techniques. It should be a force for enlightenment of *la plebe*.

It is not, however, widely read in the *colonia*. Its circulation policy—that of leaving piles of papers to be sold in the *colonia* stores—is a factor in this, as is its lack of comic strips, human interest stories, or of the columns of local items which might do much to sustain the weekly reader's attention. *La plebe* says: "Oh, it just says in Spanish what you can read in the big papers in English." This is not entirely a fair comment. The paper says many things differently and better than the local English daily, but its literary and philosophical tone may be a handicap in reaching its readers.

More serious is the disposition of the *colonia* to distrust the integrity of its editor. All the old grumblings about *explotadores* and opportunists are heard. This, too, seems to have little basis in fact. There is no evidence that the editor ever sold out on an important issue. While his advertising income comes chiefly from the other side of town, from stores there which cater to Mexican-American trade, he has been under no pressure from his advertisers, most of whom have never read—nor would be able to read—a single issue of the paper. The grumblings about him seem to have arisen from a series of minor episodes over a period of years, some of them concerned with *el director's* personal affairs, others having to do with a certain sharpness in business deals. It is a judgment made strictly on personality issues, with *la plebe* mulishly insisting that "he isn't a man one can believe."

Still, while very few say they buy the weekly regularly and claim not to believe it when they do, everyone can tell you what it said, if its statements were provocative. Youngsters will say: "Oh, I never read it. I like the big dailies better." Then they will add: "What do you think of Mr. S—'s articles on discrimi-

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nation? Do you think he really has the right idea?" *La plebe* will chuckle over and repeat a realistic phrase, as when the paper pointed out, on a certain issue, that the *colonia* was being offered *atole con el dedo*,⁸ a taste of gruel instead of full subsistence. It may be that the weekly, in spite of everything, serves a certain function of getting facts to Juan Pérez, even if he gets them eventually by word of mouth. The *colonia's* attitude towards its press may be an expression of its incomplete transition from a folk world, where the spoken word is more real than the written, where events are judged in the light of known experience, and where personal motivation is sharply examined. In some encounters with the written word, this is an advantage, but, in the case of the language weekly, it would seem to be *la plebe's* loss.

The influence of such papers as the Hearst dailies is likewise hard to gauge. Nearly everyone who can read English reads them, chiefly, it must be admitted, for comic strips, Hollywood scandal, and fashion news. But at least a cursory glance through headlines is part of the reading process. Some of the carefully distilled bold-face poison must stick. Some of it does. On matters which the reader of Mexican extraction knows first-hand, of which he has been a part, the slanted news is dismissed with a cheerful epithet of "lies." "What did you think about the things the city papers said about Mexicans during the 'zoot suit' riots?" such a reader is asked. "Oh, we didn't pay any attention. Those things are just lies. You know, it's like murders and the doings of movie stars—the editor has to make something big of it even if he lies." The *colonia* has failed to be stirred by the deliberate campaign against Americans of Japanese extraction. It knew the Japanese-Americans first-hand—bought groceries from them and lived in the same part of town. It was alert—for once—in scenting the minority persecution which attempts to set one group against another. "Oh, those things are just lies," it says. "That man thinks he'll sell a lot of papers that way." Similarly, no amount of political fulmination is going to set *la plebe* against even the

⁸ *atole con el dedo*: gruel on the finger, as it would be offered to entice an animal. It is reminiscent of Descanso's pioneer saying: "He sure saw the bridle before he smelled the oats."

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remnants of a New Deal. Juan Pérez and his peers did not live through a depression, which struck their group harder than any other in the community, to forget their friends. The rantings against the Roosevelt Administration which they read daily made no dent. "Oh, those big shots who run newspapers," they said, "they're greedy. They like to fool the poor and take everything for themselves."

However, on matters which *la plebe* does not know first-hand, it is inclined to be gullible. It fell hook, line, and sinker for the propaganda against Loyalist Spain and continues to fall, with considerable assistance from the Catholic Church. It is too ready to regard labor unions as *explotadores*, because its chief experiences with unionization, to date, have been with the sharply restricted, somewhat arrogant, craft unions. Essentially a conservative group, it falls for the adroitly tossed charge of "Communism," as applied to anything denoting social change, in as simple-minded a fashion as any other conservative group. Is someone against day nurseries? Just call them "communistic" and every good mother will keep her children home, dodging trucks on Monticello Avenue. Do certain real estate interests want to fight public housing for the *colonia*? Drop the word "communism" and Lola Pérez will envision her precious daughters entangled with a horrible "communistic" monster called "free love." Let the dominant community, naturally alert for such opportunities, succeed in attaching the label of "communist" to the most conservative—even reactionary—union organizer, and he might as well cross the *colonia* off his list for the time being.

But the fact that the *colonia's* gullibility is directly conditional upon its ignorance provides a natural limitation to these tactics. Let *la plebe* learn, either through its own experience or the assurances of someone it feels it can trust, the real facts of the matter and it will toss off the misleading labels as cheerfully as it tosses off the daily's headlines. Rather recently, an attempt was made to convince Juan Pérez and his peers that a proposed compulsory health insurance bill for the state would be "communistic." *La plebe* laughed wholeheartedly. Every member of it has, at some time in the past, been the recipient of services from

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public or institutionalized medicine. Such services have been deeply appreciated. Even persons who earned \$160 or \$180 a month knew, through bitter experience, that this income would not cover adequate medical care for good-sized families with growing children. Similarly with unemployment insurance—try to label that anything but highly desirable and Juan Pérez will say, "Oh, those big people here in the United States are just greedy, just like the old oppressors in Mexico." Provincial suspicion has its uses.

"Nativism"

Anthropologists have a fancy word for describing a group's attempt to turn back the clock, to entrench itself in old, outmoded tradition rather than to meet the problems of the day. Such an attempt, when it gains any degree of influence, is called a "nativist movement." Perhaps we are all nativists to some degree, in that we often try to meet modern problems by harking back to log cabins, little red schoolhouses, and "old pioneer days." But the term is usually applied to a minority, excluded from full participation in the life of the dominant group, which attempts to return to its historic past. Some Indian groups in the United States have made such attempts, with resultant tragedy.

Probably all immigrant groups in the United States have, at one time or another, shown mild traces of nativism. The celebration of national festivals, attended by traditional song, dance, and costume, may be considered a very much diluted nativist activity. The American of Scandinavian or Finnish descent in the Middle West, however, who attends such a program once a year and, for the other 364 days submerges himself in the general life of his community, can hardly be said to be attempting to return to his historic past. His grandfather's nativist feelings, however, were stronger and more impeding. Pride in one's origins is a healthy thing; it contributes to stability and self-respect. But when that pride becomes a preoccupation, used as an excuse for evading the hard work of integration with American life, it is a drag backward. That the existence of such a preoccupation is usually due to the hostility and ridicule with which the immigrant has been met on the American scene in no way alters its

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harmful effect on a group. The clock does not turn back for anyone.

While the general temper of the *colonia*, particularly marked in the second generation, is to press for integration with American life, to "have the best of both ways," a counter pull exists. Like all downward pulls, it is strengthened by such disasters as mass unemployment, animosity or indifference on the part of the dominant community, or loss of enlightened leadership in the *colonia*. This drag, however, does not originate in the disorganized fringe of the *colonia*, although it exists there, expressed in comments such as "The old ways are best." *Mexicanismo*, the fetish for things Mexican and the attempt to strengthen the ties of the group with Mexico, originates much higher up. The impetus comes, unconsciously, perhaps, but strongly, from the consulates.

Certainly, few consular officials have the deliberate intention of disseminating *Mexicanismo*. Most of them would disown such a claim with horror. Their job, they say, is to be of service to business groups trading with Mexico and to the declining number of Mexican aliens residing in the United States. What they do not realize is that their own personalities and attitudes, their failures as well as their accomplishments, have a profound effect on the Mexican colonies. Too many times that effect has been to hold back acculturation of the group. That this effect, in turn, stemmed from the desire of Anglo-Americans to withhold assimilation from the Mexican group does not entirely excuse the consulates—it merely explains them.

The typical consular official is a nice fellow, from the *gente decente* of Mexico, mildly ambitious, somewhat narrow in outlook, and given, like most officialdom, to the pious hope that he will never stick his neck out and get himself in trouble. His personal life in the United States contains plenty of frustrations. His wife gets homesick. He may have trouble finding a house; if he does, American neighbors may be anything but cordial. His children can't use restricted public pools—although perhaps they could if they were provided with swimming trunks labeled "*Consulado Mexicano*," to distinguish them from Juan Pérez's children. In his official business, he is likely to be reminded often,

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in subtle but effective fashion, that he is not the representative of a major power. He would not be human if he did not find solace in the flattering murmur of "*el cónsul*" which precedes him in the Mexican colony. He would be less than human if he did not capitalize on it a little.

"*El cónsul*" was an important figure to Juan Pérez. The consulate was the only possible port in a storm. It did not take the average immigrant very long to perceive that the consulate offered him more security and justice than he could get, as a naturalized American citizen, in many an American police court. The eternal complications arising out of immigrant entry, return, and re-entry were laid before the consul, who, on the whole did not enjoy his protective functions. He was inclined to feel that an unkind fate had cast his lot among a people who had a genius for getting into trouble; very often he was blind to the factors in American life which helped produce the trouble. A great naïveté about the forces at work in the American scene distinguished the average consular official. He desperately wanted to get on with the "right people"; he was impressed by prestige and money. He made his few personal friends among the *gente decente* of the Mexican colony; there often grew up a tight little social clique in which the consular officials played stellar roles.

Like the parish *padre*, with whom he often co-operated, the consular official could not provide guidance into American life, because he knew little of it himself. Furthermore, his own nostalgia for his home produced a glorification in his mind of things Mexican, which in turn was communicated to his admirers as *Mexicanismo*. It seemed right and natural for him to encourage more and more elaborate celebrations of the *fiestas patrias*,⁹ even when two-thirds of those attending were American citizens. His influence makes a Comisión Honorífica or a Confederación, like Descanso's, the most stable organization in the community. The *Casa de la Colonia*, the recreation hall to be erected in Descanso with proceeds from the *fiestas patrias*, will actually draw the *colonia* tighter to itself and farther away from participation in the life of the larger community. It will provide the city council

⁹ *fiestas patrias*: the national holiday celebrations.

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with a standing excuse for delaying needed recreational improvements in the West End. It is safe to say that none of these considerations has entered the mind of the consul, who is a well-intentioned, earnest young man. He has no wish to perpetuate his own job; if asked, he would probably say that the Americanization of the minority should be accomplished as fast as possible. He simply has little conception of how forces making for acculturation work.

Probably the same things could be said of every consulate in the United States which served a minority immigrant group. *Mexicanismo* undoubtedly had its counterpart among Italians, Greeks, Czechs, and many others. What began as solace and comfort for a dislocated group inadvertently became a force pulling them backward to the status of a nationalistic out-group. However, as the second generation appears and assimilation into American life progresses, these little "nativist movements" come to the end of their cycle. What makes *Mexicanismo* more serious for its group is that the pressures by the dominant society to withhold them from full participation are more intense. Unwittingly, *Mexicanismo* serves the forces in American life which are most hostile to the Mexican-American. It provides excuses on both sides—for the dominant group, that "Mexicans stay Mexican," and for the person of Mexican descent, a flight from reality. True, the older generation will die and the younger generation, already set against *Mexicanismo*, will take its place, but the process may be fifteen years in the doing—years which are most critical for the Mexican-American.

How much better if the consulates could provide a positive push upward into the American scene! Let a new kind of *fiestas patrias* develop, less devoted to fund-raising. Instead of the florid and well-worn platitudes about Hidalgo and Juárez, let the second-generation audience receive, twice a year, a factual education on their Mexican background. They need it badly and would appreciate it. Let every official orator point out that, while the road to assimilation may seem thorny, it must be traveled. The rewards at the end are great. Let those who have traveled it be the honored guests. Let the boys and girls who have set their feet on it be awarded public congratulations, by the consul

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himself. Let an organization like the Confederación or a Comisión Honorífica make its major object the assimilation of the group and implement that aim by encouraging education, providing financial aids, asking for trained vocational guidance for its young, stimulating the use of English in homes, and nudging the Catholic Church into working with it. Let *el cónsul* use his personal prestige to enhance the effort—he can make it fashionable, the “thing to do.” Let him, too, talk about the “best of both ways” and he will express a Mexican tradition in its finest sense.

For those tender-minded and suspicious Americans, among them the chauvinistic and the provincial, who see in any nationalism, no matter how mildly expressed, hints of “disloyalty,” it must be emphasized, with considerable underlining, that *Mexicanismo* has no political implications. It has been compatible, for years, with the greatest patriotic devotion to the United States, a devotion which every consulate has ardently encouraged. Acculturation is not political—it lies in the social sphere. *Mexicanismo* is simply nostalgia, the warm relaxing bath into which the immigrant can fall back after struggling with the rigors of assimilation. It is comforting, but it is enervating; there is always the danger that one will stay too long, floating passively. The only blame attached to the consulates is that they did not provide a more stimulating element. Perhaps the imagination and energy necessary to do so should not be expected of petty officials, performing routine tasks, preoccupied with little ambitions, personal discomforts, and mild snobbishness. But had they done so—or could they still do so—they would not only be of inestimable value to the Mexican colonies, but they would set a new standard in protective consular work. The welding together of the two populations in the Southwest, culturally and socially, is the best proof of international amity. Most of the work will have to be done by the dominant American groups, for theirs are most of the sins of neglect, but the Mexican consul can do his share. He can point out to his people those bridges which lead across the gulf.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BRIDGES ACROSS

Earning

FROM the little world of the *colonia* to the greater world of dominant Descanso and so to a full part in the national society, there could be many bridges for the American of Mexican extraction. They could be substantial and broad, free of obstacles, their approaches cleared of guards and money-changers. It is safe to say that the one-way traffic would be tremendous. Fifteen years might well see the disappearance of the *colonia* as an entity; and, long before that time, the "Mexican problem," about which Descanso has talked so much and done so little for thirty years, might dissipate as easily as a morning fog. "That's too simple," Descanso says, quickly; "you can't settle problems that way—it takes a long, long time to work these things out." What Descanso means is that it finds such a solution more distasteful than the continued dull ache it gets from the problem. Pushed partly by a changing national sentiment and partly by an impetus from the *colonia* itself, it grudgingly broadens a bridge or two and removes a barrier here and there. But it keeps the old debris handy, ready to put back in place if the times change.

When Juan Pérez first came to the United States, and for some twenty-five years thereafter, the most important bridge of all—that of economic opportunity—was a very rudimentary structure. Far from being a solid span, it more resembled one of those unsteady rope structures flung across chasms in the Andes. A few agile and courageous individuals could cross it, one at a time, but it was never intended for mass traffic. The Mexican immigrant was wanted in the United States to do some dirty, ill-paid, and irregular work, like maintaining railroad sections or picking fruit. It was thought that he should continue to do such work,

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and his sons and grandsons after him. "We don't hire Mexicans for the office—go down to the sacking department." "We don't want a Mexican in a supervisory job." "The board doesn't want a Mexican teacher." These phrases, commonplaces to the people who uttered them, delimited all too clearly the vocational sphere of the second generation.

Until very recently, the community agreement to keep the Mexican or person of Mexican extraction in his place, economically, was effective for all but occasional members of the group. Survey after survey of annual income and living conditions among Mexican-Americans told the same story: the median income was hardly that of subsistence and the resultant living conditions constituted a community menace. As late as December, 1941, the Los Angeles Co-ordinating Council reported that the median Mexican family income did not exceed \$790 a year, a figure "about \$520 less than the minimum required for decent food and housing for the average family of five persons." Descanso made no surveys of living conditions, income, or anything else in the *colonia*, but there is no reason to believe that conditions were better there. Out of 629 families who applied for unemployment relief in 1940, only 9.2 per cent were eligible for unemployment insurance benefits, not because they had not worked in covered industries, but because they had not worked a sufficient time to establish a base period. Even as late as the fall of 1942, there was no general hiring of persons of Mexican extraction in the new war industries, as reports of the Minority Groups Service of the War Manpower Commission will amply testify.

Early in 1943, the labor market became really tight in the area around Descanso. This situation, combined with the President's executive order forbidding discrimination in war industries for reasons of color, creed, or national origins, rapidly remodeled the bridge of economic opportunity for Descanso's *colonia*. For a while, every employable person was working, and working at wages which, while they did not constitute a bonanza, meant security and decency for the moment. The average individual earnings during the war were \$149.60 a month, the average family income \$191.80 a month; the latter figure was the higher

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because of the increased number of persons working per family unit. The individual earning was considerably lower than that reported as the average weekly factory wage throughout the United States in October, 1943, of \$44.86 per week, or approximately \$193.39 on a monthly basis. The only group of workers in the *colonia* who received wages approximating the national factory average were those employed by a steel and shell company. The railroad wage scale was lower, as was that of a near-by civil service establishment. And, of course, the average wage received by those in the *colonia* employed in agriculture dragged the whole average down—it was \$109.00 monthly. From all wages, it must be remembered, payroll deductions for taxes, social security, and war bonds, involved a decrease in “take home” pay; rises in the cost of living absorbed a further segment. The Bureau of Labor Statistics figured that, in October, 1943, such items reduced the factory wage from \$44.86 to \$32.54 weekly. The rise in the cost of living was then figured at 23.4 per cent; it has since been conceded to have gone much higher.

An average wage of \$149.60 did not mean, by any means, that everyone received at least that much. Ten per cent of the *colonia*'s workers remained in agriculture, where earnings can be as low as \$80.00 a month. Four and two-tenths per cent of the families studied were existing on pensions, dependency allowances, some form of categorical assistance, or “indigent aid” to unemployables. Average family incomes in this group were \$49.32 monthly—some individual incomes ran as low as \$26.00 monthly. At the other extreme, there was a group, constituting 11.3 per cent, who had *family* incomes of over \$250 monthly. With the exception of two merchants' families, where the head of the house was the sole wage earner, the larger income was due to the employment of several members of a family unit, not to individually higher earnings. There was an average of 3.44 persons employed in family units where the income was this high. The highest family income, that of \$525 monthly, occurred in the home of a widow who had two unmarried daughters and a 4-F son! In 1940, this family had been existing on a state aid budget of less than a tenth of its present income, its son hospitalized with tuberculosis.

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Dominant Descanso did not like to hear such stories of rises from penury to comparative plenty. "I suppose," it said cap-tiously, "that none of them have any idea of what to do with their money. They'll just throw it around and be back on relief again." From an observation of those families with higher incomes, there was little indication that they "threw it around" any more than dominant Descanso did—perhaps not so much. They spent money, but for things like better food, household repairs, such household equipment as is available, and clothing. Most of them had large backlogs of unfilled wants. There was some saving, chiefly in the hope of better housing after the war. Of course, the young, girls of eighteen and nineteen, who composed a large proportion of the extra employed persons in these households, were inclined to "throw it around" for clothes, movies, and general frivolity. A few families unused to anything but day-to-day spending, let good incomes dribble through their fingers without any idea of where the money went, but it is safe to say they could be matched on the other side of town.

Of far more moment than the question who threw what around was that of how long full employment would continue for the *colonia*, and whether equal access to job opportunities could be widened to fields other than war industry. Employers were fulsome in their praise of the adaptability, responsibility, and teachability of their Mexican-American employees. *La plebe* asked, "Do they really mean that, or are they just saying it because they need the help?" There is a horrible suspicion in the *colonia* that the old days of irregular, ill-paid work will descend soon. Hours and incomes have dropped; layoffs have been heavy. Girls, women, and returned veterans compose an increasing number of jobless. And everyone wonders what the future path of layoffs will be. The careless statements of some employers that they will "let the Negroes go before the Mexicans" is certainly not consolatory—it merely indicates the path of discriminatory firing. Few Mexican-Americans have arrived in supervisory or even in skilled positions; only 3.6 per cent of the group employed in industry had attained anything approximating such positions. The *colonia* knows only too well the position of the unskilled worker in a loose labor market.

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Nor had they seniority. Over 40 per cent of the *colonia's* workers were in new employment; that is, they were hired at their wartime jobs some time between January, 1943, and February, 1944. A third of them were in what was frankly recognized to be war industry—industry which may or may not remain in the locality, but which will certainly not operate at its wartime peak. Some 43.14 per cent were, fortunately, in occupations covered by unemployment insurance; but the large group employed at the civil service establishment did not have this protection, nor did those employed in agriculture. From the point of view of maintaining a labor force, the most shortsighted move growers and shippers in the citrus industry ever made was to press for exclusion of their field crews from coverage by unemployment insurance benefits. Most of the group employed in new war industry were former agricultural workers. Second to better wages, they gave as their reason for change the coverage by unemployment benefits in the newer employment.

As has been indicated elsewhere, agriculture is the least preferred of all occupations in the *colonia*. It is rated low not only by the second generation, but by all of the immigrant generation, including those at present working in it. Those employed in agriculture throughout the war were decidedly the less efficient, the old, the partially disabled, and the illiterate. They gave as their reason for remaining in agricultural employment the fear that they would not be able to perform satisfactorily elsewhere. They hope that their loyalty will be rewarded by continued employment, but they are dubious about any change for the better in the uncertain, fluctuating, seasonal nature of agricultural labor demand.

By contrast, employment with the railroad rates high in desirability. Most males in the *colonia* like to be known as "Santa Fe men," even though they are merely track workers. It might be added that the chief attraction of railroad work lies in the promise of continuity and regularity—otherwise employment with the steel company would rate highest of all. There is, however, much criticism of the Santa Fe and its policies, among workers of all grades. The depression, with its spotty extra-gang work (in which income for a sizable family was often lower than pre-

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vailing relief budgets) left a bad taste in the *colonia's* mouth. There is a general feeling that the company takes advantage of technicalities to evade pension and hospitalization obligations. But the most general and bitter criticism is directed toward the hiring and provisioning agency.

Of all the *explotadores*, the *colonia* says, the supply company stands first, because of its size and its tie-up with hiring. It is called the "spider with the web," the "*caimán* [alligator] with the big mouth" and other unflattering epithets, even by otherwise loyal Santa Fe workers of some twenty years' standing. "You watch, the supply company is catching the *nacionales* [recently important contract workers from Mexico] in its web." "It waits, to catch a man with a big family and swallow him whole with debt." "It is so good it even exploits the little exploiters" (colony merchants who have business dealing with the company). Such observations must distress its local manager—if he ever hears them—who is a kindly, elderly man, with a surprising fund of knowledge about and sympathy with his clientele. So far as can be ascertained, the supply company is no worse and no better than any company commissary. All commissaries are exploitative; all represent archaic labor policies; all are deeply resented by workers. It is merely surprising that a modern industry should cling to one; that one should exist which is set up on frankly ethnic principles lends no further luster to its practices.

Regularity and continuity of employment is the great desire of the labor force of the *colonia*; as yet, it outweighs all concern with hourly wages. If one looks at the record, such a desire is easy enough to understand. For the 11 per cent of the *colonia* which now had a wartime income of over \$250 a month, the average length of employment in 1940 was 6.2 months. It is true, of course, that this group contained many persons who in 1940 were too young to work. But, for the entire labor force of the *colonia*, taking into consideration only those who were over eighteen in 1940, the average length of employment was 8.4 months. And it is safe to say that 1940 represented a much better employment picture, for the country at large, than any of the preceding years since 1930.

The worker's answer to the problem of a disadvantaged posi-

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tion in the labor market is usually conceded to be organization. This is an answer which is just beginning to be explored in the *colonia*. Several things have made this introduction somewhat retarded. One was the nature of existing union organization in the larger community. Descanso has proudly called itself a "working-man's town," but it has not been termed a "union town." From all accounts, a considerable developing power by craft unions was given a permanent setback by the failure of the railroad strike of 1924; until recently, the story in this field has been one of recovery rather than of advance. Emphasis was given to consolidating union gains among those vocational groups which were skilled, relatively well-paid, and consistently employed—an effort which naturally excluded the *colonia*, even if the insistence on citizenship as a prerequisite to membership had not already done so. More seriously, the stereotypes and prejudices of dominant Descanso against the person of Mexican extraction became part of the mental equipment of the rank-and-file, as well as of many a union official. Despite a great deal of current publicity on the part of the American Federation of Labor about "racial equality," these prejudices have not disappeared overnight. The excuse that "the men on the job won't work with a Mexican," given as valid reason for shunting a skilled Mexican-American to the laborers' division, indicates that this organization has a job of education to do on its membership.

The American Federation of Labor claims a majority of membership in the Santa Fe shops, although it has no contract. The opinion seems to be that most of the membership is on the higher skilled levels and that, as such, it includes few Mexican-Americans. Reports of organizational efforts reaching unskilled shop and track workers have been heard, but there were no union members among the Santa Fe families studied in Descanso. "They'll be the last to come in—they know they're replaceable," was a company comment on this situation.

Replaceable or not, Mexican-American membership was very ardently courted by the American Federation of Labor during a recent election held at the steel company to determine the bargaining agent in production. Comparatively large sums of money were spent, over a period of time, with the Spanish-language

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weekly; a union official appeared on many of the programs of the Defense Committee and contributed signed articles to the paper in support of its anti-discrimination policy. This effort seems to have moderate success. While CIO won the election, memberships in AFL ran as high as 62.3 per cent of the workers studied who were employed at the steel company. No CIO memberships were reported in the sampling taken. Before a subsequent election held to determine the bargaining agent in both steel and shell production, CIO made an effort to reach the *colonia* through advertising in its paper—although its editor, possibly influenced by the former lavishness of AFL, refused to accept such advertising except at “political” rates.

The effect of the steel company’s elections seems to be a healthy one for the workers in the *colonia*. In these families, one does not hear the old talk about “exploiters” and “communism,” nor does one encounter the apathetic, defeatist attitude that the Mexican will be used as a pawn—that he is not really wanted by anyone. There is, instead, brisk and rather well-informed discussion on the subject of unions in general; regardless of affiliation, this segment of the *colonia*’s working force is being educated to the advantages of unionization for the unskilled worker.

In agriculture, the old attitudes of apathy, ignorance, and suspicion appear to prevail—and for good reason. The hostility of California growers to unionization within the industry is too well known and well documented to need retelling here. It is sufficient to say that the memory of many a violently repressed strike, like that of 1936 in Orange County, is vivid in the memory of every Mexican-American field worker. Many an old orange picker—and a majority of them are old today—quakes in his shoes at the idea of running up against the “bosses.” But it is safe to say that those returning from industry to agriculture will not quake. The comparative success of a local of FTA-CIO in organizing fruit and packing sheds throughout the state may eventually be communicated to field workers.

The packing shed workers, however, are skilled; they know the crop cycle so intimately that they can calculate to a nicety the prospect of hitting every crop at the peak. They are willing to be migrant, and alert to capitalize on their fluidity. The Mexi-

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can-American never liked being a migrant; he likes it less now that he has had a chance to settle down. The crop cycle in Descanso Valley and environs does not offer sufficient variety to guarantee anything approaching full annual employment; the various plans for employment "stabilization" have, to date, carried an ill-concealed threat of peonage. The Mexican-American would like to be done with the whole dismal business of migrant field work, but he is afraid that the postwar period will force him back into it. If he can return to it as a skilled man, migrating under controlled conditions, backed by an organization which will insure orderly bargaining, he may come to feel differently about agricultural work. His employer may find such labor a more efficient item on a cost sheet than the old ragged, sick, discouraged armies—there is some evidence that shed managers are coming to an appreciation of the trained, well-organized packer. But much will have to change in California agriculture before any such millennium arrives for the field worker. His present hope is that he will not be subject to vicious competition, either from imported contract workers held on the labor market too long or from an invasion of homeless unemployed.

Improved labor policies and stabilization in the two industries—railroad and agriculture—in which the bulk of the *colonia* has formerly been employed, do not, in themselves, provide complete answers to the economic problems of the Mexican-American. There is still the question of advancement in employment, and this question is becoming a burning one with the returned veteran. "You can't have Mexicans in supervisory positions," has long been a railroad tenet. It is still a tenet, unspoken, unwritten, for the most part, but subtly effective, in other industries as well. Its bite becomes sharper as one climbs the socioeconomic ladder.

The Mexican-American business or professional man finds himself in a position not very different from that of the Negro of the same status, in that he must depend on his own group for his income. If he (or she) is hired as a teacher, it is for a "Mexican" school. If he operates a store, it is for Mexican-Americans; if a newspaper, it is for them, too. Social workers carry Mexican case-loads; doctors and lawyers find their most dependable source

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of income among their own group. A certain amount of this is useful and good. Far better that Mexican-Americans be served, in these capacities, by trained and sympathetic persons of their own group than by the prejudiced and frankly opportunistic of others. Carried to excess, however, this process bottles up and frustrates good talent. A subtle form of segregation, it is perhaps more injurious than all the rest, because it closes—or limits sharply—the way out at the top of the semi-caste. Not only does it discourage the youth of the group from training themselves as they should, but it denies to the larger community abilities and personalities of a very high order. The performance of those who have broken through the crust of prejudice merely emphasizes this fact.

Of all the renovations which should be made in the bridge of economic opportunity, that giving equal advancement and equal opportunity to the qualified person of Mexican extraction is perhaps the most important of all. The whole upward pull in the *colonia* depends on this. The old orange pickers or the old track workers cannot be salvaged. In our economy, to talk about “re-training” or “rehabilitating” the unskilled laborers over forty-five is merely talk—and rather misleading talk. The only thing we can do for them is to maintain as full employment as possible and to protect the technological and physical discards by enlightened social legislation, admitting frankly that by such protection of others we also protect ourselves. But their sons and daughters—and their grandchildren—constitute a different matter. Unless Descanso wants a permanent “Mexican problem”—and it must be admitted that it often acts as though it did—the present improved economic opportunity for the *colonia* must be, not only maintained, but widened. Descanso must make up its mind that its own economic advantage depends on doing just this.

Learning

Every society devises a means for training its young for participation in the adult life of the community. In Los Conejos, where there was almost no formal schooling, the family and the neighborhood provided this training. Boys learned techniques

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for making a living and girls for managing a household, as soon as they could toddle, by assisting with adult occupations. Because both work and play were communal, the growing child learned what we call "social adjustment"—how to live as a useful citizen of his community—by daily practice. For spiritual, imaginative, and creative development, there was provision in community festival, dance, song, and decorative arts. This education had its limitations, particularly for future participation in an industrial world, but its techniques were extraordinarily sound. They fulfilled what such an authority as Sir Richard Livingstone has described as a major principle of education: the cross-fertilization of theory and experience. "It is not profitable to study theory," he remarks, "without some practical experience of the facts to which it relates."¹

Basically, the educational aims of our society are not different from those of Los Conejos. We want to teach our young skills for earning a living and rearing another generation. We want them to be useful citizens of a community. We also recognize, although in perhaps a less universal fashion than Los Conejos, that the spiritual and creative side of life cannot be left a vacuum. What we have ignored, until very recently, is the welding together of practical experience and formal theory as part of the educational process. This is admittedly a much more difficult process in a complex civilization than in a cohesive, rural society like that of Los Conejos; but the failure to achieve it is the failure to educate, in the sense of preparation for life.

In Los Conejos, the famous break between home and school did not exist. The home was the school and the community was also the school, holding classes every hour of the day. At one time in our national existence, when we were a rural, agricultural society, something of this situation obtained. Our occasional nostalgia for little red schoolhouses is probably not for those crude institutions themselves, but for the type of community, a far more effective educative influence, of which they were a part. The great problem of modern education is not to return to these conditions, for return is both impossible and undesirable,

¹ Sir Richard Livingstone, *On Education*, New York: Macmillan, 1944, p. 17.

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but to incorporate living experience into its curriculum in such a fashion that, of much a child is taught, it can be said "the touch of life has turned to truth." In those lessons which deal with citizenship and responsibility in a democracy, it is most important that the "touch of life" be present. Democratic living is an art, and, like all arts, it demands sustained practice. Four or five is not too early an age to begin training for performance, and it is safe to say that two periods a week with a high-school civics book constitute something which is both too late and too little.

Descanso, for many years, has proceeded to "untrain" large numbers of its little citizens for democratic living. By setting up a segregated school system, it not only untrained Juan Pérez's children but it untrained the small descendants of pioneers. The lessons each group, sequestered from the other, learned were those nicely calculated to nurture stereotyped thinking, prejudice, fear, and friction. There is a whole generation of young adults in Descanso which has been trained in this fashion, so thoroughly that 'it is doubtful whether much of it can be overcome. And Descanso, in its careless, planless fashion, succeeded in saddling itself with school plant so located that it is questionable whether much improvement can be made for the present generation of school children.

Officially, there is no segregation in Descanso's school system. However, even the official boast dates only from September, 1944. Prior to that time, the *barrio pequeño*, the district in the south of town, had a curious situation where white and Negro children were permitted to attend the same elementary schools, but Mexican-Americans were forced into a segregated school. In other words, the children who played together on the streets of this very mixed district were separated for their school hours. The usual excuse given for segregating children of Mexican extraction, that of linguistic difficulties, held less water here than other places, because Mexican-American children picked up English from their playmates before they were school age. Apparently the segregation had started when the immigrant Mexican families first began to move into the *barrio pequeño*. Before that time, the considerable number of children of "California Mexi-

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can" extraction were not segregated. The "Mexican school" was the oldest structure in the city, a veritable museum piece. The teaching personnel was not of the best, but, even if it had been, the lack of equipment made modern instruction almost impossible. Anyway, after much prodding and pushing of officials and board members, this archaic segregation practice was finally done away with. Mexican-Americans go off, with the other children, to elementary school, and the old "Mexican school" building is being prepared to serve as a youth center, badly needed in the locality.

The situation in Descanso's *colonia* is much more serious, because it cannot be solved by a simple matter of redistricting. Part of the difficulty, it is true, lies with the domiciliary segregation of the Mexican-American population itself; but this difficulty has been doubled by the erection of two very substantial school buildings in locations neatly calculated to assure the continuance of segregation. Short of demolishing these comparatively new buildings, the only answer seems to lie in the continued movement of Mexican-Americans away from the *colonia*. There is yet another answer: the ruthless gerrymandering of school districts to secure more democratically representative student bodies in the West End of Descanso. The results might well justify such techniques, but, as one principal said, "I'd hate to be the school superintendent who tried to put it into effect in Descanso."

Until 1926, there was no segregated schooling in the West End, although it was true that Mexican-American children composed about 60 per cent of the enrollment of the one elementary school. When crowding made another elementary building desirable, it was located three blocks from the first school, thus setting up a district within a district. The second school was designed for an all-Mexican enrollment, although some children of Mexican extraction were permitted—and still are—to attend the "mixed" school. The process of separating the sheep from the goats is a curious one. Officially, separation is supposed to be made on linguistic grounds—the children who have some command of English are permitted to attend the mixed school, the others go to the "Mexican" school. Actually, many other factors having slight connection with a command of English enter in. Apparent pros-

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perity, cleanliness, the aggressiveness of parents, and the quota of Mexican-Americans already in the mixed school are factors. Children coming from families where older brothers and sisters have been backward or troublemakers are likely to be shunted to the all-Mexican school; throughout the child's elementary schooling, the disciplinary threat of being sent to the Mexican school for "failure to adjust" hangs over him.

In 1936, Descanso further improved its segregation policies by erecting, on the extreme west end of town, practically at the township line, a junior high school intended for children of Mexican extraction. As matters now stand, the small alumni of the "mixed" school are permitted to attend the "mixed" junior high school on the other side of town; but the alumni of the "Mexican" elementary school go on to the "Mexican" junior high, there to complete the major part of their schooling under segregated conditions. Thus junior high jurisdiction also contains a district within a district.

A more complicated and less sense-making pattern can scarcely be imagined. It sounds as irrational as a nightmare, and it often proves to be exactly that for parents, children, and school administrators involved in it. The pity of it is that the final touch—the erection of a junior high practically on the edge of the big wash west of Descanso, where no residential development can ever take place—was not added until the comparatively late date of 1936. The junior high school building lacks many pieces of standard equipment, notably a gymnasium and an auditorium. The question of whether to add them, now, hinges on the problem of the desirability of more plant for a building already a white elephant, from point of view of location. The principal of the school, himself no partisan of segregation, has exercised imagination and ingenuity in overcoming the lacks of the school; but he admits that its greatest lack—that of childhood opportunity for democratic experience—is one about which he can do little.

The child who spends ten years of his school life in a segregated system emerges speaking accented English for the rest of his life. Learning a language is essentially a social process. If a language is spoken only in the classroom, it will not be well learned; and no amount of authoritarian pressure can keep a

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child from speaking the language of his home on the playground, if he is among others of his own group only. Actually, children with a fair command of English have lost it, after transfer into a segregated school. More serious, however, is the one-sided development, the ignorance of life outside one's own group, which results from segregation.

The transfer from the segregated junior high school to the big "mixed" high school is a moment of crisis for every Mexican-American adolescent. Graduating classes gather together and share their lore on the nature of the new world. "My sister says those 'Americans' are all right, you don't have to be afraid." "My brothers say the teachers think all the kids from this school are *pachucos*." "The main thing is not to say anything in class, then you don't give yourself away." "You only have to go full time until you're sixteen, anyway." No band of explorers entering a strange jungle could have more misgivings and less knowledge. It is safe to say that many of the failures to continue in high school, beyond the minimum exacted by the law, are caused by the trepidation and lack of social preparation with which it is approached. It is fatally easy, at sixteen, to give up the whole struggle, merely go a few hours a week to continuation school, and fall back into the comforting familiarities of the *colonia* and *Mexicanismo*. The group who do so are often those of whom the exasperated Anglo-American remarks, "Here they were born in this country and went through our schools, and you'd think they'd just come from Mexico!"

The reason usually advanced for segregation is that of linguistic difficulty. It seems a queer one to advance in a country which has educated millions of second-generation children, speaking all sorts of foreign tongues, without recourse to segregation. The Catholic parochial schools of the Southwest have, for decades, educated little Irish-Americans and Italian-Americans and Mexican-Americans, side by side without segregation or "opportunity rooms," either one. The linguistic adaptability of children is tremendous, as anyone who has taken a small child to a foreign country can testify. But the secret of that adaptability lies in constant opportunity for practice, before vocal patterns are set and self-consciousness arises. It might be added that, in the segrega-

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tion process, no use was made of special techniques adapted to bilingual children, a procedure which might have constituted the only justification. In many cases, the use of the few words of Spanish teachers might know was forbidden by administrative authorities; reading was taught by techniques which presumed the child to have a sizable English vocabulary.

Another argument advanced for segregation was that it would provide happier childhood experience, free of the friction and conflict that a second-generation child would encounter in a "mixed" school. The fatal flaw in this reasoning is, of course, the premise that conflict among ethnic groups has to be part of playground experience and that the teacher can do nothing to avoid or resolve it. It has certainly been true in the past that too many schools operated on this premise, with teachers contributing their own entrenched biases to the operation. "You know," said a young Mexican-American, "when I first came to school in S— [a neighboring town] the other kids wouldn't let the Mexicans on the playground at all. We were supposed to stay on a weedy vacant lot that wasn't even school property. The teachers didn't do a thing about it. I complained to mine, and she said, 'Now, Manuel, we mustn't be selfish, must we?' But when I organized the Mexican kids and we fought for the playground—yes, and fought dirty and used rocks when we were outnumbered—then the teachers had plenty to say." With new findings in psychology and anthropology available to teachers, through countless institutes and summer courses, ethnic conflict should become a problem as amenable to solution as reading failures. And if resolutions of conflict have to be made, it is better that they be done in childhood rather than the period of adolescence.

It is doubtful, however, whether either of these reasons for segregation was more than a pretext. A retired, veteran teacher said, "I attended every one of those meetings about segregated schools, and all that was said about either language or social difficulties could have been put in your eye. We spent our time listening to citizens' delegations and parents' petitions, all to the effect that they didn't want their children in the same schools with dirty, ignorant foreigners." Another teacher said: "Yes, I know many teachers have supported segregation, some still do. I'd hate

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to count the number of master's theses that have been written in its defense, but, behind all the quotations and footnotes, you could be sure of one thing. The teachers who felt that way were concerned with their own status. They wanted to teach in the silk-stocking districts themselves, not down in Spanishtown, where they didn't have the imagination, guts, or energy to be a success." Top administrative thinking in educational circles is certainly against segregation, today; it is disappearing in one city and county system after another. Yet too many teachers and far too many parents quote the old pretexts in justification of the segregation which remains.

The disappearance of segregation and its resultant retardation will put many substantial planks in the bridge labeled "learning," but some other renovations are needed, also. Some of these Mexican-Americans, themselves, can begin laying. The tragedy of the second generation is that it is so incompletely educated. Veterans' preference in civil service and other fields is not going to mean much to the veteran who has a ninth-grade education or less. Too many young boys, like David Pérez, are handicapping themselves for life by a refusal to continue education beyond the mandatory age of sixteen. It is true that, for the young man who was a soldier, continuing his education would have meant not only personal sacrifice but hardship for his family. Most of the families in the *colonia* today would have incomes of \$140 or \$150 a month, if their young had not gone to work; five years ago, those incomes would have been \$80 or less. Getting beyond the ninth or tenth grade represents an almost unsurmountable hurdle for the child from a low-income family. It is here that most of the educational mortality occurs, and it is here that federal or state aid is badly needed, for the promising youth. High school diploma in hand, he can usually manage part-time jobs and scholarships for college; but the last two years of high school represent a grim struggle, in which the rest of his family are often unwilling sacrifices.

In this respect, the essential realism of the *colonia* has often served it amiss. By answering the question, "Why finish high school if you can only pick fruit?" negatively, families have often limited their young so that they are equipped only to pick fruit

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or to perform some unskilled equivalent. Despite the admiration for the educated man in the *colonia*, *la plebe* is inclined to think that education for its own sons should stop with learning a good trade. "It doesn't do a Mexican any good to get an education." "Look at that Salazar girl—two years at college and she couldn't get a job anywhere but in a bakery." "He starved himself and his family to go to college, and then nobody would hire him to teach." Defeatist comments like these, plus the colony emphasis on early marriage, have nipped many a promising youthful career before it even budded. True, it is hard to sacrifice and plan for a future you are not at all sure will be realized, for vocations all but barred to you, with poverty and the limitations of minority status pressing hard all the time—but it is better than being caught flatly unprepared when there is opportunity. When 62 per cent of the applicants of Mexican extraction for a civil service position requiring a ninth-grade education fail to meet educational requirements, it is time for *la plebe* to adjust the sights on its realism. The existence of well-trained, well-qualified young people of Mexican extraction will provide the best argument in the world for talking down discriminatory hiring. At least, it can no longer be said, "But we can't find any Mexican with the educational requirement."

There are many things the school system could do to insure the better education of promising young Mexican-Americans. True, administrators often argue that it is undemocratic to give special attention and special effort to minority members—if it is, so is giving a handicap in a golf game, an old American custom, undemocratic. The principle of public education is to give everyone an equal start, so far as possible. Good college material from minority groups gets shunted off into terminal courses through bad counseling, teacher prejudice, or sheer inattention. Teachers will say, "Well, of course, Manuel is a good student, but don't you think, when a boy comes from such a poor family, it's doing him a disservice to encourage higher education?" Or, "Armida is such a brilliant girl, but you just know she'll marry at seventeen, like all these Mexican girls." One counselor solved all her minority problems by advising "a trade for the boys and domestic science for the girls." Even a sympathetic

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and resourceful counselor admitted that she often felt "a great reluctance to counsel members of minority groups into vocations calling for college preparation, because of the odds against them in placement." Too many decisions about higher education are made on the basis of "forms" sent home to parents, who find them both incomprehensible and formidable.

Vocational counseling for the young—any young—is no bed of roses these days, as an alert counselor will freely admit. "If I had a crystal ball on my desk," said one, "which would give me a hint as to the possibility of full employment and the nature of technological change, I wouldn't be as uncertain as I am. For all I know, I may be counseling for skills which will no longer exist ten years hence, and for a world whose economy I cannot even envisage." Few counselors are so frank or so sensitive to change. Many are complacently counseling for skills and a world which ceased to exist fifteen years ago. "Doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief" and the rest of the row of buttons compose most of their vocational arsenal. "Why do you counsel so many of your Mexican-American students into commercial courses, when the chances of placing Mexican-American typists in this town are almost non-existent?" a counselor was asked. "To teach them respect for the white-collar job," was the answer.

Possibly training for counseling should include recurrent employment in a placement office, such as those of the United States Employment Service. The intensely practical bird's-eye view of industry which such work gives would dispel many an academic dream-world. The experience of reviewing labor demands, month after month, also brings into view many a novel, uncrowded field, particularly adapted to minority counseling. That of assistants in commercial laboratories is one, for example, and that of trained institutional attendants is another. However, no counselor should hope to lose her biased thinking about minorities through such an experience. Despite all the presidential orders in the world, the federal employment services exist to serve and please employers in their areas, and they reflect existing community prejudice with alarming fidelity. When they can manage, they cater to them. That great motto of the government employee, "Never stick your neck out," is emblazoned in large if

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invisible letters in every one of their offices; and most of their personnel, hold-overs from state organization days, needs no encouragement to abide by it. If minority counseling had been learned in the state employment office of eight years ago, the net result would have been to send most Mexican-Americans off to thin onions at 18½ cents an hour. No banners for fair employment practices are being carried in the USES offices, although a great deal of lip-service is being given.

The USES office in Descanso has done a good piece of work in establishing a placement office in the continuation high school. Coming at a time when the protection of the young against exploitation in a tight labor market was of critical importance, the office served as a convenient channel to legitimate employment. Its bright, young personnel—in appearance, almost as young as the clients—established a firm, warm rapport with high school students; and their unpretentious, factual approach stirred some academic cobwebs in several surrounding offices. “For fun”—just to see if it could be done—the placement personnel experimented with effecting minority placements in quarters previously considered unapproachable. Their success provided a talking point for enthusiasm, tact, and persistence; in the process, they developed some techniques worth copying elsewhere. Together with the principal of the continuation school, who was also young and alert, they succeeded in developing an atmosphere which young people from low-income groups, including many Mexican-Americans, felt was friendly, “live,” and competent to assist him. David Pérez and his friends say, “They’re sure all right. I like to go back there, just to talk.” “They’ve got the answers,” one boy said, “and they give them straight.”

Not only members of minority groups, but the youth of the country at large, need to feel that school is a place they like to go, that they get answers and get them “straight.” Sincerity, enthusiasm, and lack of pretense touch and stimulate the young in a particular fashion; few are so delinquent that they do not respond to it. In their own way, they recognize this as the “touch of life.” The more of life and life experience there is in the curriculum, the more they will be held by it and the better they will learn. For the child of a low-income group, and of that particu-

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larly disadvantaged economic group known as a minority, this is still truer. These children need honest answers early in life. They will not accept others—they are made bored and rebellious by them. Pressed by adult problems, knowledgeable at an early age about the pitfalls and difficulties of life, they resent a school existence which seems to them to be shut off in a little compartment, removed from reality. They do not want to be wrapped in cotton wool, smothered in platitudes and good intentions—life will not let them be so. Actuality and theory must be fused for them, in the school.

This does not mean the undue emphasis on “vocational training” and “home economics,” which some persons have imagined the solution to minority group education. As practiced in the South and elsewhere, this sort of curriculum merely emphasizes inequality and trains for nothing. Good vocational training requires equipment, industrially trained personnel, and exacting standards which the average public school system cannot afford or secure. “Vocational orientation” would perhaps be a better object, for all children, having as its purpose the bringing to light of particular aptitudes and tastes. Summer and part-time work placement, made through the school and carefully controlled by the school, should be considered part of the curriculum. Expensive schools like Putney and Bennington have found this a desirable technique for children of high-income families; there is more reason why it should be so for the children of lower-income families, where the question of earning a living is a pressing one, from the age of twelve on.

Particularly in a democratic society, however, preparation for earning a living, however important, cannot be considered the ultimate goal of education. “Education,” says Sir Richard Livingstone,² “. . . is the formation, largely unconscious, of an outlook and an attitude.” On the outlooks and attitudes of the masses of people in a democracy its future and very survival depend. If that is a truism, it is certainly one to whose validity we have given too little attention. If a child grows up convinced that he lives in a world of “dog eat dog,” where you “get all you can get while the getting is good,” where you “look out for number

² Livingstone, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

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one," where the touchstone of conduct is "what you can get away with," and idealism "corny" or a "cover-up," he has some excellent preliminary training for being a little fascist, but practically none for being a democratic citizen. He will become part of that apathetic mass—self-seeking, easily swayed by demagogues, lacking any standard except that of material gain—which is the great threat of a democracy. And the child will learn this, if the society around him reflects it, no matter how many reams of "idealism," "patriotism," and "citizenship" are contained in the pages of his schoolbooks. Cruelly honest and perceptive, the child will learn and believe only if he sees the best lessons of democratic living exemplified in the society around him, and has, himself, a chance to practice them in the schoolroom. Citizenship and character, unlike arithmetic, cannot be taught out of a book.

One of the most promising educational movements is that aspect of inter-cultural education which makes the classroom a proving-ground for working with those of diverse cultural, national, and racial backgrounds. Cities like Springfield, Massachusetts,³ feel that such experiments have been successful beyond their most sanguine hopes, because, not only is "tolerance" taught, but many appendant lessons of altruism, co-operation, courage, and resource. Descanso, with its minority problems not only of the Mexican-American group but of in-migrant Americans like Okies, and Negro and Oriental racial groups, has shown no disposition to follow suit. Such things are among those it feels will "stir up trouble." Pressed, it growls about "returning to the three R's," and talks lovingly of the one-room schoolhouses which the pioneers attended. What it really feels nostalgia for is a community which approached an entity, like the Descanso of early days. What it fails to see is that, to achieve it today, takes the courage and enterprise of a pioneer.

If Descanso were convinced that the disappearance of its "Mexican problem" in another generation was essential to civic welfare, it could well turn its attention to public education. It could make up its mind to get rid, at all costs, of a system whereby an ethnic group is segregated for ten years of its school-

³ Clyde R. Miller, "Community Wages Total War on Prejudice," *Nation's Schools*, Vol. 3, No. 1, January, 1944.

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ing. It could rid its teaching personnel and its parents of the outmoded idea that intelligence testing measures hereditary endowment, divorced from all environmental factors. It could insure the preparation for college of its promising young citizens, regardless of income or origin. It could be sure that vocational counseling never serves the purpose of maintaining economic disadvantage. It could incorporate into its school curriculum the living experience necessary to produce character and citizenship suitable for a democracy. It might find that, in the doing, it had developed, not only a homogeneous community, but an educational system where practical experience and educational theory were joined.

Even if dominant Descanso never makes a step in this direction, however, the task of the *colonia* is clear. Every young person of ability there must receive the best education he can manage, or that the *colonia* can manage for him. Colony organizations could well copy the methods of the Protestant settlements in providing practical aids, individual encouragement, and concrete information. The task will not be an easy one if the dominant community continues indifferent or actively opposed to equal opportunity for the young of the *colonia*, because the dominant community, in the final analysis, determines the nature of leadership and direction in the *colonia*. It is asking a great deal of young people to make sacrifices for goals that are uncertain or far in the future; and, if prejudice and segregation continue, the disappointments will be many for them. It is only the example of those who have already made the sacrifices and crossed the bridges which makes the asking valid.

Youngsters attempting the task will find, as their older brothers and sisters have found, the individual teacher whose sympathy and advice are invaluable. Almost every school has one. In the life stories of second-generation leaders, such a teacher always appears. "I guess I started thinking about college when Miss B— took an interest in me." "Mr. H— got me a job in a filling station that summer or I never could have made it." "I was fed up—I was going to quit, but Miss L— talked me out of it. She even went to see my uncle, the one who wanted me to quit." "I didn't think Mexicans *could* go to college, until Miss A— told me."

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Many a principal of a "Mexican" school has done a job for which his community ought to award a distinguished service plaque—and his customary reward has been to be jibed at as a "Mexican-lover." To these individuals and to the administrative heads who are now earnest in trying to do an honest, resourceful job on minority education, the greatest credit is due. There should be many more of them. Too many routine posts, and some administrative ones, are still in the hands of those who, consciously or unconsciously, keep barriers on the bridge.

CHAPTER IX

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"Discrimination"

FOR TWO years or more, the Spanish-language paper in the *colonia* has carried on a campaign against the refusal of certain rights and privileges to Americans of Mexican extraction. "Discrimination," in this sense, has no exact equivalent in Spanish; it has to be translated "*abusos contra los derechos civiles*"¹ or "*prejuicios raciales en contra de los Mexicanos*,"² both of which phrases more exactly describe the situation than "discrimination." For, according to dominant Descanso, discrimination is just a little social quirk or idiosyncrasy, an expression of personal taste which could not possibly have legal implications. From this premise, Descanso proceeds to argue that moves to curtail discriminatory practices constitute infringements of personal liberty. The personal liberty of the dominant group is meant, of course, for the personal liberties of other groups are not a factor, from this point of view. Descanso tries to place a dislike for seeing little Americans of Mexican descent in a public swimming pool in the same class as a dislike of seeing onions on the dinner table. It has not only so rationalized its breaches of civil trust for itself. It has, in the past, succeeded in convincing many a Mexican-American that fighting for equal privileges constituted a social error, a simple case of bad manners—pushing yourself in where you weren't wanted.

There are few legal bars, as such, against the Mexican or American of Mexican descent. He is counted on the white side of miscegenation statutes, as a rule. No Jim-Crowism is part of

¹ *abusos contra los derechos civiles*: abuses of civil rights.

² *prejuicios raciales en contra de los Mexicanos*: racial prejudices against Mexicans.

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his life, even in the sovereign State of Texas. School segregation is put upon a basis other than the ethnic, officially. Courts have held that the non-Caucasian clauses of restrictive residence covenants do not include persons of Mexican ancestry. If he is a citizen, he is not barred from the polls. These are advantages which the dominant community is quick to point out, particularly when it is trying to drive a wedge between the Mexican-American minority and other minorities less favored. In some ways, this position is an asset, but in other respects it is a liability. It makes the job of fighting the extra-legal discrimination all the more difficult. Rather than having the job of battering down a wall, the Mexican-American finds himself entangled in a spider web, whose outlines are difficult to see but whose clinging, silken strands hold tight.

For many years, the immigrant and his sons made no effort to free themselves. They burned with resentment over a thousand slights, but they did so in private, or among others of their kind. "Docility" was the most admired characteristic of the Mexican immigrant, by the dominant group, who often added "cowardly" to the description. The immigrant was not a coward, but he was bewildered, leaderless, and desperately in search of security. "Don't go where you're not wanted," "Keep your mouth closed and you won't give yourself away," and "Don't get *la raza* in trouble" were some of the admonitions he gave himself and his children. Violations of civil rights were likely to be greeted in the *colonia* with an apathetic, saddened shrug and the comment, "Yes, that is how they treat us Mexicans." The man who submerged himself in *Mexicanismo* was a more admired figure than the man who stood up for his rights and so "got us all into trouble." Perhaps this passivity is the mark of any minority which is just emerging from severe exploitation, but the immigrant and his sons seemed to remain in this stage a long time.

In the end, it was the war which really awoke Descanso's *colonia*, as it did many another Mexican colony in the Southwest. In a world in which the heroic sacrifice of Americans of Mexican descent at Bataan and Corregidor could be followed, in eighteen months, by riots against Americans of Mexican descent in Los Angeles, passive accommodation lost much of its value. It

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has become trite to make this observation, but there is force and clarity in the triteness. The immigrant mother in the *colonia*, who had lost a son in battle, felt quite simply that his little brothers should be able to attend a public plunge or an unsegregated school.

The incident in the *colonia* which fired it to social action made such a direct connection between sacrifice in war and civil rights. The son of one of the prominent men in the *colonia* was killed in flight training and the body was shipped home for military burial. Wishing the best last resting-place possible, the father bought a lot in a near-by "memorial park." The man in charge thought him an Italian, it was later explained. When the father returned with the mother and her relatives to view the lot, his money was returned and the purchase refused with the explanation, "Oh, we didn't know you were Mexican. We don't bury Mexicans here." The military funeral was eventually held elsewhere. Now, this sort of thing had been happening for years. It still happens, and the bodies concerned are often in uniform, to be interred with American flags. But the fact that it took place in such a dramatic fashion, involving such a shock to a grief-stricken mother, striking such an exemplary, *gente decente* family, aroused the whole *colonia*. The story is still told by indignant women in the *colonia*, written in letters to relatives in Mexico, and recounted on visits there. Every *nacional* (imported contract worker) eventually hears it. As a nullifier of "good-will" policies, it and stories like it are potent forces.

Indignation coalesced in the formation of the Defense Committee and the successful fight to open the public plunge to the public, regardless of national or ethnic origins. The plan for the committee originally embraced a series of such court cases, based on concrete situations, and touching one after another of the spheres in which Mexican-Americans encountered discrimination. The *colonia* had its steam up. Instead, however, of finding another concrete case like that of the public plunge, it ran into a network of half-defined, nebulous situations. All of them involved discriminatory practices, but none of them provided the explicit detail needed for legal action. In some cases, the city,

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having no mind to be caught flat-footed again, had hastily put in a little legal window-dressing.

The display of "white trade only" signs and the refusal of service to persons of Mexican descent was to have been a target for the committee. The city council quickly made the display of such signs illegal, but scarcely a month passes when some Mexican-Americans are not refused service in a bar or café. Techniques for doing so are facilitated by the plethora of customers in these establishments. The tables are all filled, and none ever seem to empty for Mexican-Americans—those people who were let in ahead had "reservations." Or the ethnically undesired customer is seated, but got no service—for as long a period as two hours. Or it just happens to be "club night" in a certain establishment, and the management is very sorry that it cannot serve those without a card. Or, if the case is finally brought to court, the judge may blandly rule that no "demand" for service was made, regardless of the evidence presented. The *colonia* leaders have learned that the best place to press a case is the federal court, if jurisdiction can be obtained, and that the most experienced and expensive legal talent is none too good.

Segregated schooling was also on the agenda of the Defense Committee. The school board quickly forestalled possible action by doing away with segregation in the *barrio pequeño*. About the school situation in the West End, the board wrings its hands, protesting, "But, you see, no amount of re-districting will improve this. It's just an unfortunate situation our predecessors wished on us. Anyway, it's the fault of the Mexicans. They all like to live in the same place." Any admission by *colonia* leadership that the situation is difficult and that the concentration of Mexican population does not improve it, is seized upon by administrators as proof that the *colonia* approves segregation—hence nothing should ever be done about it.

Contrary to the wishful thinking of Descanso, all Mexican-Americans do not like to live "in the same place," particularly if that place represents the most inadequate, ramshackle, crowded housing in the city. Volumes have been written about the poor housing of the Mexican-American throughout the Southwest; Descanso is no exception to the general picture. A quick look at

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the County Housing Authority's map is all that is necessary to confirm this fact. Two dark-brown sections, labeled "sub-standard," stand out—they are the *colonia* and the *barrio pequeño*. They represent the sub-standard housing for the city. They also represent the areas of greatest population density.

The history of any family who had an income beyond a subsistence level usually contains an incident somewhat like the following: "When my father got to be assistant foreman, he decided to look for a better house. He answered the ads in the paper, but the people just said flatly they wouldn't rent to Mexicans. Then he decided he'd buy, but it was the same thing there. The house we wanted wasn't much, and it was only about four blocks the other side of the tracks. The sale was all ready to go through, when the owner backed out. The neighbors had been raising hell about selling to Mexicans. So finally my father just bought another shack, next door to the one we already had, to have room for his family. It's the one where my married brother lives now." A college student said, "The sociology courses can't teach me anything about 'invasion.' One of the first things I remember is the time we tried to rent a house just north of here. We'd been there for two weeks when the agent came around to say that we'd have to move at the end of the month—the neighbors had protested to the owner. That evening, some teachers—Anglo-Americans who were friends of my father's—came down to talk about the 'Mexican problem.' The real Mexican problem, the one that had mother in tears, they couldn't do anything about."

The housing bars against the Mexican-American have been exactly this sort—invisible ones. While there are restrictive covenants in many a deed in the north of town, they are thought of as applying to Negroes or Orientals. Actually, about fifty families of Mexican extraction live outside the *colonia*, and thirty-five of them have moved across the tracks in the last two years. Some families, of "high type" pseudo-Mexican or "Spanish" origin, have always lived outside the *colonia*; this group usually includes the consular officials and their families. Once a Mexican-American family is settled in a neighborhood, there is little friction. Sometimes there is active good will and friendliness, if the neighbors happen to be Catholic also. The friction arises when another

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family of Mexican extraction tries to move into the same general neighborhood. "We don't want any more Mexicans on this street," is the slogan, applicable no matter how "high type" and "Spanish" the invaders may be. If a number of families of Mexican extraction begin to move into a neighborhood, it may suddenly develop that there are no houses for sale for miles around. Owners have just changed their minds about selling, say the agents, and what can one do? Thus, without recourse to anything so crude as a restrictive covenant, a quota system is actually set up for movement away from the *colonia*.

The less desirable the Anglo-American neighborhood the smaller the quota is. The professional man of good income may encounter little difficulty in moving near the country club, but the workingman who wants to move five or six blocks east of the *colonia* is likely to find no takers for his down payment. This has the effect of bottling up those families who are most in need of improved housing. The result is to multiply shack upon shack on the crowded streets and narrow lots west of the tracks.

Descanso has, in the past, turned a deaf ear to any sweeping proposals for slum-clearance and decent low-cost housing. Nice, civic-minded ladies have actually talked in favor of retention of the slum areas. "You know, I'd hate to see Barbarita Street [a crowded alley known in social-work circles as 'Delinquency Row'] go. It's just like a bit of old Mexico, with the cactus fences and tiny houses covered with roses. When I have visitors I always take them down to see it." The number of Mexican-American families buying in the north and east of Descanso, however, has recently given such civic-planners pause. "With money in their pockets," says Descanso, "they'll all be trying to move into our part of town. It may be that better housing, privately financed if possible, in that end of town, would keep them where they belong." There is even talk of making everything terribly "old Spanish" and picturesque, with rows of oleanders and mission arches; and the Confederation of Mexican Societies, with its plans for a *Casa de la Colonia*, is helping segregation along. "See," say the civic planners, "even those prominent Mexicans would rather stay in the West End. They're happier among their own kind."

It is true that about 60 per cent of the *colonia* either owns its

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homes or is buying them; this is as true in the meanest streets as in those where housing is not sub-standard. Most of the purchases have involved hard work, sacrifice, and considerable planning. A man like Juan Pérez may not have received much for his money, by the time interest charges are counted in, but to him it means a degree of security. He will not be willing to give it up unless he is sure that he will get at least as much security in return. Neither will he be happy in a barracks-like apartment structure, no matter how scientifically planned. He likes to have a small yard, a few fruit trees and flowers, and some chickens. "It's obvious," said a housing authority on a tour of the *colonia*, "that the pattern for Mexican-American rehousing should be the cottage community type—with fences for every front yard!" Give Juan Pérez a chance at such a home, even outside the *colonia*, on some rental or purchase basis which will guarantee him tenure, and he would jump at the chance. He gets a hungry gleam in his eye when he sees pictures of the bright, clean homes of Swedish workers' villages, and he would not be at all reluctant to see his children farther away from the *cantinas* and drunks of Monticello Avenue.

Certainly some of the elderly, to whom ownership of anything—even a board-and-batten with the battens off and the roof leaking—represents a miracle, would be difficult to move. Much of their stubbornness is fear of falling into the hands of another *explotador*. The *padre*, too, would probably represent an obstacle. Sincerely anxious as he is for better living conditions for his parishioners, he is not eager to see them dispersed. The colony scoffers say, "If the flock ever scattered, he'd never collect it again." His plans for a parochial school in the *colonia* depend upon new generations of Mexican-Americans being born there. To date, he has seemed to incline strongly toward privately erected family units, no slum clearance, and oleanders.

The second generation, however, has little nostalgia for the *colonia*. "Sure, maybe it's picturesque," said a high-school boy, "to Anglo slumming parties who can live anywhere they want to. Maybe they'd feel differently if they tried it here for a while. I don't want to lose touch with my family, but, if I make any wages at all, I'm sure going to get out of this sink-hole." "No

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kids of mine are going to be brought up there, if I can help it," is another very general comment. Only one thing, apparently, will hold the second generation in the *colonia*. "Maybe I should get out, for my children's sake," said a young father, "but I'm afraid of losing touch with my people, while they still need help. It's a question many of us face—whether it's better to move across town and show, by example, what can be done, or to stay here, in the middle of things, and help more of our people move eventually."

In housing, as in other matters, there are no obvious barriers, legally labeled as such, before the Mexican-American. But the invisible barrier can be just as impenetrable and far more tantalizing. Its operation is often more effective than if it had been embodied in law, because it is difficult to isolate and fight. To a group as distinguished by sensitive pride as the Mexican-American, such techniques are cruelly effective. An honest insistence on a basic right can be made to look like a mere social faux pas, "pushing in where you aren't wanted." To a few elite, the hope is always held out that, if they are sufficiently "high type" and willing to cut themselves off from the rest, the invisible barrier can be broken. The dominant community can always pretend that its right hand does not know what its left hand is doing. "Why, we haven't any discrimination—we have a Mexican in the Elks."

As a last resort, the Mexican-American can always be encouraged to ponder how much better off he is than the Negro or the Oriental. This tactic has the added advantage, from the point of view of the dominant group, of setting one minority against another. If it can divide minority action on such an issue, for example, as a permanent Fair Employment Practice Committee, it can say, "The very people who would profit from this are squabbling among themselves. If they will cut one another's throats for advantage, what can you expect the poor employer to do?" On questions of educational facilities, access to public facilities, relief budgets, and even unionization, the same dividing tactic is used time and time again. One minority group is offered a little *atole con el dedo*, and off it trots, wagging its tail. The Mexican-American group has certainly fallen for this bait

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repeatedly, to the ill-disguised amusement of those who proffered it.

Many of the problems of the Mexican-American are different than those of the Negro or the Oriental. He has an advantage in that the caste is not closed, completely, at the top for him. With this advantage, the Mexican-American could easily constitute the spearhead for advance in all minority gains. He has a freedom of action and movement often denied to other minority members; he can attempt things impossible for them. But the gains he would make for all minorities would be gains for him, too. Desperately as the Mexican-American has pretended—particularly under snobbish, self-seeking leadership—that he is better off than *los tintos*,³ he knows that the difference is one of degree rather than of kind. Whatever the ethnic niceties of the situation may be, that is the way the sociological cards fell, from 1910 on.

The same sensitive pride which makes the Mexican-American wince unduly under slights also makes him too anxious to please—to be judged favorably by the dominant group. When *la plebe* says, of its prejudices toward *los tintos* and others, that “they are things we learned from you people,” it is not far from the truth. Los Conejos offered little scope for race prejudice. Members of the *gente decente* felt themselves, in general, superior to the few Negroes or Chinese they encountered; but the preoccupation with race, the allergy to a darker skin, the thousands of status-weighted allusions to it, was something they had to learn here. In states like Texas, it was in the very air they breathed. There was no surer way to please an Anglo than to slight a Negro, and much of the early accommodating leadership among Mexican immigrants made ample use of this technique.

The *colonia*, apparently, has a divided mind on the subject. Among its top leadership, there are at least two individuals who openly proclaim and practice minority solidarity. A third recognizes the necessity of working with Negro groups, particularly in politics, but adds a few private reservations about “knowing them socially.” The others, pushed in some cases by *gente decente* families, would like to cling to the advantage of being “better than *los tintos*,” even in public action. The second generation,

³ *los tintos*: slang for colored, usually applied to Negroes.

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even among its leaders, is uncertain in regard to public action with Negro groups—for the most part, it is uninformed regarding their objectives. Friendships and alliances in school activities, among them playground fights, occur between Mexican-American and Negro youth, but they are seldom sustained after school hours. There is little contact of an intimate social sort between the *colonia* families and the Negroes who have moved in at its east edge, save among very young children. (In the *barrio pequeño*, however, where families of the two groups have lived side by side for several years, there are not only friendships among children but visiting and sociability among families of the two groups.) However, for all the distance between the two groups in the *colonia*, there is instant, quick sympathy for the Negro who is obviously exploited or mistreated by dominant groups.

In regard to the Orientals, there is still remoteness, but of a slightly different sort. To *la plebe*, the Oriental businessman—market owner, nurseryman, “herb doctor,” or vegetable wholesaler—represented an economically advantaged person, sometimes a potential employer. He was not, as the Negro often was, a competitor in the same labor market. He could be admired for his acumen and success; to do him credit, he apparently did not take undue advantage of his position. There was genuine sympathy in the *colonia*, for the exiled Japanese-Americans, several of whom lived and had businesses within the *colonia*. Even the Mexican-Americans who occupy Nisei-owned property have no theoretical objections to their return, although, should return coincide with a housing shortage, there might be friction. Nor do families who have lost sons in the Pacific area confuse the issue of the Japanese enemy with that of the loyal resident or citizen of the United States—a rather remarkable achievement, considering the radio and press campaign to which they have been exposed. With regard to the Japanese-Americans, there seemed to be cognizance by *la plebe* that mistreatment of this minority threatened other minorities. However, aside from respect for the Oriental’s financial success and sympathy for his minority status, there is little closeness between the two groups in the sense of friendship or intermarriage. Both disapprove

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such closer connections, although they are able to live side by side in harmony.

In speaking of people and their groupings, one must be very careful—as Descanso is not—to distinguish between (1) the tendency of persons of like interests, background, and taste to cluster together and (2) the refusal of basic rights, such as access to education, public facilities, or employment, by one group to another. It is the latter which is “discrimination.” That it may have originally grown out of the former does not justify its existence, as Descanso appears to think. No one should know better than Descanso that “natural” tendencies, uncurbed, fast develop into vices! It is something the *colonia* could consider before, out of a desire to curry favor, it copies the vices.

On Being a Citizen

Seventy-eight per cent of the individuals in the *colonia* are American citizens, but most of them have attained citizenship through birth. Out of 277 immigrant individuals interviewed, only one was a naturalized citizen and only three others had taken out first papers. Yet every one of these persons intended to stay in the United States permanently and considered it his country. Not one had the slightest desire or intention of returning to Mexico. Still, few in this group had any definite plans for becoming naturalized citizens of the United States. One gathered that naturalization would be deferred and postponed until death overtook the immigrant group, still aliens in a country in which they had lived most of their lives.

To the Native Son or vociferous professional patriot in Descanso, such a situation can mean only one thing: if such a resident is not actually disloyal, he is certainly indifferent to the institutions of his adopted country and ungrateful for the benefits he has received. Curiously enough, a like charge is not made against the comparatively large numbers of Canadians and Englishmen who have shown a similar reluctance to naturalize themselves. “Well, you know, they’re so much like us, anyway,” says Descanso deprecatingly, “that you could hardly consider them foreigners.” The word alien is seldom applied to an English-

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man, even when he indisputably is one and intends to remain so.

Concerning the reluctance of Juan Pérez and his countrymen to becoming citizens, many guesses have been hazarded. A feeling of attachment to Mexico, strengthened by the physical nearness of the home country, has often been thought one of the reasons. *Mexicanismo*, it has been pointed out, does exist, but it seems to be rather a refuge and an escape from the difficulties of integration with American life than nationalism as such. The fact that naturalization confers no added status or privileges in American life is undoubtedly a factor. As long as the tenet that "once a Mexican, always a Mexican" is held by the dominant community, the position of the naturalized citizen is little different than that of his alien neighbor. In some respects, it may be worse, because the protection of the consulate is thereby withdrawn.

Behind these reasons, however, is an eminently practical one, which seems to have been generally overlooked. For the Mexican immigrant who entered the United States prior to 1924, the process of proving that he ever got here at all is complicated, expensive, and fraught with potential danger. He may very likely succeed in proving only that he was an illegal entrant and find himself holding, instead of first papers, a one-way deportee's ticket to the border. Such was the general chaos of entry, spurred by the labor demands in the United States, and such has been the zeal of immigration officers in pouncing on technicalities, that no immigrant, no matter how valid his intentions were, is at all sure that he is now in the United States legally. It is a recurring nightmare for him, making a crisis of applications for public assistance and certain types of employment, as well as for citizenship. Even if he decides to steel himself to the possibility of deportation, the process of proving continuous residence in the United States since entry and/or the legal nature of any subsequent return and re-entry, no matter how brief, is a herculean undertaking. For persons who have been excessively migrant, or for those who were brought to the United States at an early age by their parents, proof may be simply impossible. At best, it is likely to involve fees for expert assistance running as high as fifty to a hundred dollars.

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Anyone who has tried to assist a Mexican immigrant—as compared to earlier European immigrants whose records of entry were in good order—in the preliminaries to citizenship is well aware of the difficulties involved. It is no accident that the bulk of naturalized citizens in the *colonia* are those who entered after 1924, when regulations for entry were enforced and some sort of orderly accounting maintained. A large number of quasi-immigrants who remain unnaturalized, even though they have spent their lives in the United States and speak perfectly acceptable English, quite frankly admit that they remain aliens because they have neither the finances nor the courage to tackle the job of proving that they got here legally. Even the older immigrant, after he has given all the customary reasons about having a “hard head” for the learning of English, is likely to settle on the difficulty of proving entry as a main deterrent. “Look at that Pedro Saenz. He was going to be a citizen. And where is he now? Back in Juárez, with his wife and children starving here.”

In view of the fact that slipshod entry was largely the result of American zeal for cheap labor, it might seem as though some of the unholy punctiliousness after the act might be relaxed. A reasonable construing of facts of entry prior to 1924, combined with some conveniently located and resourcefully taught adult education classes, might result in a veritable rush of Mexican applicants for citizenship. As it is now, even the enticements of old age assistance, so desperately needed by the elderly laborer, are insufficient to entice him into the perilous and costly business of applying for citizenship.

For the person of Mexican extraction who is a citizen, either through birth or naturalization, it might be well to inquire what extra privileges he receives and in what fashion he discharges particular responsibilities or duties. He need not imagine that, by becoming a citizen or being born one, he will escape any of the limitations of the semi-caste. There is a street in Descanso on which three families live side by side. The head of one family is a naturalized citizen, who arrived here eighteen years ago; the head of the second is an alien who came to the United States in 1905; the head of the third is the descendant of people who came to Descanso Valley in 1843. All of them, with their families,

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live in poor housing; earn approximately \$150 a month as unskilled laborers; send their children to "Mexican" schools; and encounter the same sort of discriminatory practices. To dominant Descanso, all are "Mexicans"—none are "Americans."

There is a large potential voting population in the *colonia*, and it is getting larger every year. The *colonia's* vote could easily swing the ward of which it is a part, because, although the ward is large, population density at its upper end is slight. Any group which composes 12 per cent of the population is a force on the ballot, if it is active. If the *colonia* is not aware of this, there is certainly awareness elsewhere. The Mexican-American vote is watched carefully, by men with political "know." Those who would like to maintain the status quo draw a long breath when it shows its customary apathy.

Politics in the *colonia* is incredibly lily-white and naive, compared to that in the rest of the city. What activity exists is conducted just the way the civics books say it should be, with the result that it is often as far removed from reality as the civics books. In many ways, this high-principled behavior is an asset. An honest vote, if it could be registered in quantity at the polls, would advance the *colonia* much farther than attempting to play fancy games with the old hands on the other side of town. To date, the Mexican-American vote in Descanso is not "sold," nor can it be "delivered." The cynics and the disappointed among the Anglo-Americans say that is because it just cannot be aroused. But whenever it shows any activity at all, there is considerable excitement on the other side of town; and the activity is likely to be interpreted as being more significant than it really is.

The *colonia* leadership is aware that voting power is potential strength, but it has not yet learned the techniques, nor is it willing to do the hard foot-work necessary to turn it out, precinct by precinct. A special ward election produced the Liga Cívica, an attempt in this direction, but too hastily organized to count for much in the election it was supposed to influence. Most of the persons thus registered voted in the national primaries, though. Registration of additional voters proceeded sporadically throughout the spring and early summer, with the result that the national election produced what county officials considered a record

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Mexican-American vote of 73.90 per cent in this ward, not too far below the city average of 79.75. It is, however, a general and dangerous tendency of masses everywhere in the United States to display political activity only once every four years. The Mexican-American will have to learn, along with many other groups, that it is unceasing vigilance at the polls—all the way from Congressional primaries down to school board and water district elections—which counts.

Jury duty presents a startlingly biased picture in Descanso. No Mexican-Americans serve on juries, nor are they apparently wanted—although several Negroes do serve. The story is an interesting one. In Descanso, for county jury duty, the judges draw up lists of prospective jurors, to whom the clerk then sends questionnaires. On the basis of the returned questionnaires—and by judgments which include such items as “neatness of handwriting”—lists of jurors are formed. These lists are constantly revised, and one of the bases for removal of a juror’s name is his continued unacceptability to lawyers trying cases before the Superior Court. “In a big county like this, we can’t keep calling people in, at five cents a mile, if the lawyers won’t take them when they get here.”

In 1942, after prodding from some quarter or other, it was decided to include Mexican-American names for the first time on the judges’ lists. Ten names were obtained, some of them, apparently, from the police. The incident of “the nicest little Mexican housewife, who wrote such a good hand, but was found to have been a shoplifter” may have been a by-product of the method of selection. Several others were eliminated because they were found “not mentally alert” or “just too ignorant.” Inasmuch as the *colonia* contains several persons with college degrees and a hundred or so, all perfectly bilingual, with high-school diplomas, it rather appeared as though the original selection had been faulty. However, the real slaughter apparently came through the attorneys. “The attorneys just would not permit them to serve,” said a minor court official. “We had a lot of criminal cases involving Mexicans that year, and attorneys just would not have Mexicans on the jury for these cases.” That was the end of

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Mexican-American jury service; there are no Hispanic names on the jury lists today.

However, Negro jurors serve in comparatively large numbers, and attorneys like to have them on juries for criminal cases involving Negroes. This may be the hand of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—or it may be something quite different. “You see,” explained an attorney, “the Negroes who serve are all old-timers here in town. We know them and they know us. They’re all good, conscientious people. We don’t call any of these excitable new Negroes.” At one time, jury lists contained as many as fifteen Negro names for 500 white names, a figure which made the unofficial quota of one-half of one per cent of the Negro population look rather badly ciphered. Inasmuch as registered voters may apply for jury duty and the inclination of the judges, who have to maintain reasonable rotation of names, is to consider those applications, the *colonia* has a job before it. There are plenty of mentally alert and well-educated merchants who could afford to let the relatives run the *tienda* for a day and numerous respectable housewives, innocent of the slightest thought of shoplifting, who would make intelligent jurors. Jury duty may be a bore and an inconvenience, but it is a “must” for a minority.

The Police and the Press

With this brief glimpse of the exit end of the judicial hopper, it might be well to turn to its intake department, that of law enforcement. The Mexican immigrant in the United States has been accused of having an unusually high rate of crime and delinquency; and the doings of some of his children, tagged as “zoot suiters” or “*pachucos*,” have furnished copy for sensational journalistic imaginations to an extent not even exceeded by Hollywood. To Descanso’s press, any scared fifteen-year-old who falls into the hands of the police on Monticello Avenue is a “zoot suiter,” complete with knife, bicycle chain “knuckles,” and a criminally mature philosophy. Furthermore, he is a *Mexican* “zoot suiter,” a *Mexican* “gang member,” or a *Mexican* delinquent, regardless of the fact that he was born in the United States.

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The press, in Descanso and elsewhere, has succeeded in building up a body of highly spiced misinformation in the public mind, whereby a Mexican colony is peopled entirely by vicious youth with criminal tendencies. The presence of a few Mike Maldonados and Jimmy Garcías idling on a street corner is sufficient to send a thrill of eager horror up the spines of a slumming party. "See—*pachucos*!"

As has been pointed out, the number of Mexican-American youth who have any degree of criminal maturity is small. Still, the number of arrests of juveniles of Mexican extraction is large, compared to the proportion of the population their group represents. The *colonia* and the *barrio pequeño*, with 12 per cent of the population of Descanso, furnish 28 per cent of juvenile arrests. It must be remembered that bad housing and slum conditions, whatever the population concerned, are conceded to account for a 15 per cent rise in delinquency rates. Not only are these two areas *the* slums of Descanso, but they have been notably lacking, to date, in public recreation facilities. It is certain, furthermore, that the prejudices, conscious or unconscious, of law enforcement officers provide further impetus to frequent arrest. The average Descanso police officer is not an unkindly man—the flagrant abuses of justice and decency toward minorities which are routine in some cities occur here only sporadically. Police officers simply share the run-of-the-mill biases of the dominant group; they are in a position to act on them oftener. Untrained in the philosophy of juvenile work in general, they certainly have no special equipment for the delicate business of handling second-generation youth. To such an officer, the youthful population of the West End is likely to appear as "jail bait."

If the arrest pattern of juveniles points to one moral, it is that the young Mexican-American leaves himself statistically unprotected by his habit of idling on street corners. The places at which arrests most commonly occur and the times at which they are made point up the picture vividly. Mike Maldonado and his pals are gathered at the corner of Sixth and Monticello, with no more criminal intent than that of "watching what is going on." If they are noisy, when the police car comes around at 9:30 P.M., they are "disturbing the peace." If they move a hundred feet in

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one direction or another, they are "loitering in the vicinity of a pool hall." If they have succeeded in getting some liquor from one of the disreputable *cantinas*, they may be "drunk and disorderly," by the time of the next appearance of the police car. At a later hour, a few may have committed "malicious mischief," out of idleness and curiosity. If they drift over to a municipal dance, their very appearance in a body may lead to further disturbance of the peace. The tragedy of juvenile misbehavior everywhere is its essential unplanned, undeliberated nature. Even serious offenses have their genesis in aimless drifting; the criminal action is so spontaneous that it surprises even the doer. "We was just standing around and we saw this car with the keys in it," has been the inception of many a juvenile case of grand theft, among all groups. The boy of Descanso's *colonia*, in following the village pattern of recreation set by his elders—that of idling and conversing on the streets—puts himself in further jeopardy.

The average boy who gets arrested in the *colonia* is not a recidivist. Few boys are arrested twice within a year's time, but new little fish swim into the net all the time. Their home addresses correspond, with terrifying exactitude, to those areas designated by housing authorities as most sub-standard. Their offenses run much higher during the winter months, when these homes seem more crowded and unattractive. Not all such boys, by any means, come from the disorganized fringe of the *colonia*, but most of them come from homes where the parents know little of American life. It might be added that, say what you will for the cloistering of girls, it has a positive effect on delinquency statistics. Practically *no* Mexican-American girl is ever arrested by the police. The old tradition of male freedom at adolescence, however, is certainly a contributing factor to the difficulties of the *colonia's* boys.

Rarely is a Mexican woman in difficulties with the law, either, and still more rarely does she slip into prostitution. Adult males, however, contribute more extensively to arrest records than do their sons. The offense which leads to their involvement with the law is always the same one, repeated with monotonous regularity over acres of police blotters. It is drunkenness, as a rule uncomplicated by any other charge. The offenders are, largely, the

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laborers of middle age and over. They stagger coming out of a *cantina*, they go to sleep in parks, or they relieve the demands of nature at a picket fence. They are arrested, they pay fines of ten or fifteen dollars apiece, and they start the whole cycle over again the next week or month. They represent, with amazing fidelity, those families in the lower disorganized fringe of the *colonia*.

The *colonia* is not proud of these befuddled oldsters, but it has a certain sympathy for them. "Those police cars are like *zopilotes*.⁴ They circle these streets. It doesn't make any difference how quiet a man is. If he is alone on the streets at night, he is stopped. If he has had a drink or two, he is drunk." One old man proudly described a certain function he performs for his neighbors. "I have lived here forty years and the police know me for a good man. Anyway, it now upsets my stomach to drink. But I go with my friends and when we come home, I keep the edge of the sidewalk. The police car stops and I say, 'Good evening, Mister Policeman, it is just me, Tomás Valdes, and these boys here are my nephews.' They make a joke and go away. But it is very dangerous to be on the streets at night if you do not know the police." The police frankly admit that they arrest any Mexican, particularly a laborer, who seems to have been drinking, while they would exercise greater leniency toward other groups in other places; they feel that the person of Mexican extraction has a greater propensity for "getting into trouble" after having a few drinks. They also admit that this vigilance has no appreciable effect in reducing adult arrests for drunkenness—nor to their recollection, did prohibition. Total adult fines, from this district, average as much as \$500 to \$700 monthly, particularly during the winter months. Like the young, the adult male seems to be more law-abiding during the summer. One repeated offender of middle age, asked why he never got in jail during the summer, replied, "It's warm at home in summer, but, when it rains, the *cantina* is more comfortable."

The question of what to do with the old, ill-adjusted, discouraged laborer who has no place to go except a *cantina* is not a simple one. Perhaps he is as difficult of rehabilitation socially as

⁴ *zopilotes*: buzzards.

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he is vocationally. But the question of what to do with a fifteen-year-old who has no place to go except the streets is comparatively easy. Descanso has proved, in a small way, that solution is possible; unfortunately, it has shown little interest in following the matter up. During the summer of 1943, delinquency was appreciably lowered by a night-park program of ball games held on a vacant lot one block north of "Delinquency Corner." During the summer of 1944, the same program reduced delinquency to zero for six weeks and to a previously unknown low for the remainder of vacation. Winter recreation admittedly involves more resource, equipment, and personnel, but that is scarcely an excuse for its non-existence. The very fact that the *colonia* has no entrenched gang organizations, little recidivism, and juvenile delinquency chiefly of a casual and accidental type argues that recreational therapy would work well. If decent housing were added to the cure, recovery might very well be complete.

"The same old stuff," says Descanso when it hears about recreation and housing as solutions of juvenile problems. The trouble is not that they are the "same old stuff," but that they have never been adequately tried. If a quarter of the energy Descanso has expended, in the last three years, in solemn conclaves on "the delinquency problem" had been turned to getting decent recreation on the West Side, it would now have less to talk about. If a sixteenth of the energy expended in shuddering over headlines about "zoot suiters" and mongering rumors about girl *pachucas* with knives secreted in their pompadours had been so turned, it might have nothing at all to talk about. The inescapable conclusion is that Descanso prefers to keep delinquency as a conversation piece.

In that decision, it gets considerable assistance from its press. The *Descanso Reporter* is not a yellow sheet, by any means; nor does it entirely reflect the entrenched reaction of a great deal of the national press.⁵ It usually curbs sensationalism and scandal sharply in its pages. Sporadically, it espouses a liberal point of view, much in the manner of a swimmer putting a toe in a cold

⁵ A prize-winning *Atlantic Monthly* article provides an excellent discussion of the press in the United States. Robert Lasch, "For a Free Press," *Atlantic Monthly*, CLXXIV (July, 1944), 39-44.

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plunge. Most of the time, however, it attempts to keep in exact step with the prejudices and biases of the communities it serves—or, more exactly, with the points of view held by the powerful groups in those communities. This, its editors sincerely believe, is “reflecting public opinion.” On the question of the Mexican-American minority, it has not been guiltless of helping to form those biases and prejudices.

A specific incident will serve as an example. At one of the municipal dances, a group of sailors made passes, verbally and otherwise, at some Mexican-American girls. Their boy friends protested—the sailors persisted, saying, “Do you want to make something of it?” In the fight that ensued, a fifteen-year-old Mexican-American boy slashed a sailor’s wrist with a penknife. No one in the excited crowd gave first aid, and the sailor lost considerable blood. The next afternoon—a Sunday—a crowd of servicemen gathered in the park near the municipal auditorium, and there was talk, apparently, of a “march on Monticello Avenue.” The military authorities, grown wise in such matters, promptly canceled leaves for a ten-day period. There—except for the trial of the boy who, outnumbered by older and heavier opponents, had unwisely used a knife—the matter might have rested, as the sailor recovered very promptly.

The *Reporter*, however, ran headlines in its city section, and followed them by some very imaginative misstatements. Not a word was said about the provocation given the Mexican-Americans. Phrases like “undeclared war between servicemen and zoot-suited Mexican youths,” “a gang of twenty-five Mexican *pachucos* attacked four service men,” “the zoot suiters fled in the darkness at the approach of officers,” and “military authorities ordered a ten-day state of emergency” worked the city up to the boiling point. Rumors of all varieties circulated over every bar and soda fountain. The sailor had died, and the Mexican community had begged the *Reporter* to suppress the news for fear of reprisals. Nine *pachuca* girls with knives in their hair had been arrested and had confessed to a pact to seduce and murder sailors. A Mexican-American youth had been discovered hanged. Armed *pachucos* from other communities were planning a “march on Descanso.”

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As if to nullify the prompt quieting action taken by military authorities, the *Reporter* published a long interview with a man who described himself as head of the Fathers of Fighting Sons. "It is not right that our sons are denied the right to freely walk the streets of the country while criminals and lawless elements are permitted to roam at large at all hours," said this dignitary, who was privately characterized by his familiars as a "Texas crackpot." The police, meanwhile, were arresting Mexican-American youths for questioning. The paper published the names and addresses of all of them and made no retractions when it was clear they had nothing to do with the knifing. Ironically enough, the boys and girls who had been the focus of the disturbance were in no sense *pachucos*. They came from good homes, on the upper levels of the *colonia*, and had good school and employment records. The fifteen-year-old who wielded the knife had not come with them. He had inserted himself, gratuitously and certainly unwanted, into the fracas, apparently to show off. Nothing about the whole incident connoted gang organization or "criminal and lawless elements."

The matter of securing a fair hearing for the boys who had done no knifing, but had merely defended girls of their group, proved to be a complicated matter. At the first hearing, the presiding judge acted as though he had been doing too much newspaper reading. It took the expenditure of considerable money, the hiring of an attorney outside the area, and another hearing to bring out the real facts of the case. Those facts received no newspaper headlines, needless to say, nor even any mention. Dominant Descanso is still convinced that twenty-five "Mexican *pachucos*" wantonly attacked some heroic men in uniform. When it goes to Monticello Avenue to eat "Spanish food," it imagines every shadowy street peopled with lurking, stealthy criminal figures, armed with "razor-sharp four-inch blades" (the *Reporter's* journalese for "pocketknife").

Why a respectable, civic-minded man like the editor of the *Reporter*, which normally forswears the sensationalism of metropolitan journals, lent himself to a display of this sort is difficult to imagine. There is complete evidence by now—of which he must have been aware—that, if you want a riot, this is the way

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to produce it. Descanso certainly displayed riot psychology for three or four days. The *colonia* says, "Oh, he just wanted to sell some more newspapers," or, more perceptively, "Maybe he got mad at something and he felt like taking it out on the Mexicans." Anyone who believes in the essentially dualistic nature of man would have been fascinated, during those three days in Descanso, in watching normally kind, friendly faces display sadism, fear, and spite. It was impossible to believe that these average citizens, too, did not have something they wished to "take out" on a scapegoat—perhaps their own frustrations, insecurities, and self-mistrust.

The damage worked by one of these incidents lasts a long time. The public mind seems to have a genius for retaining dramatic untruths. It desperately wants to blame somebody or something else for situations which arise from its own shortcomings. The editor of the *Reporter* has annulled much of his courageous stand on slum-clearance and improvement of conditions in the West End. "Why give those people anything?" say the shrill voices of Descanso's citizenry. "They're criminals and foreigners and generally low!" As if finally aware of this, the *Reporter's* editorial page, some months later, carried eight paragraphs headed "True Americans." After listing the names of boys of Mexican ancestry who had died in battle, the editorial made a plea for "plans for the postwar era" which would take into account "the part these young Americans of Mexican ancestry are to play in our tomorrow." The editorial might have added: "These young men are exactly like those other youngsters—no better, no worse—whom we were mistakenly calling criminals three months ago. Two of those youngsters are now in the service. Let us hope that, when they are in battle for us, they will remember us with a charity which we do not deserve."

Armed Service

That its young men of Mexican extraction are coming back from the wars with a "new concept of life"—to quote the editorial—Descanso has no doubt. It is a little nervous about the situation. In public offices and places of influence, one hears con-

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stantly repeated the idea that "these things will really be problems when all the Mexican boys who've seen service get home." Will these boys be docile track laborers and orange pickers? Will they want to live in a shack in the *colonia*? Can they be refused service at bars and cafés? Will they be satisfied to "stay in their own part of town"? Will they insist on "social equality," with its connotation of friendship and intermarriage? Will "once a Mexican, always a Mexican" still hold true?

Descanso is inclined to think it will not, but of how such a change will come about it has no idea. "Gradually," it says, or "by education." It shows, by every action, that it hopes the day of reckoning will be far in the future. It maintains, meanwhile, the old barriers against the mothers, fathers, sisters, wives, and little brothers of Mexican-American veterans. Does it imagine that it can "do something" for these veterans which will not include their families, their communities, and the very climate of opinion of Descanso itself? Does it fancy that "doing something," in the honest sense of granting full integration with American life, will not involve reconstruction of its whole status-system, with the corollary cheap labor complex? If the expressions of its leading citizens are any criteria, this is exactly what it does fancy. It wants to make a gesture and still preserve the status quo. Like an unwilling horse, it feels itself dragged, by national and international events, toward a goal it sniffs suspiciously.

There is scarcely a home in the *colonia* which did not have a son in service; many had three or more. The big families the social workers used to frown on have their uses in time of war. By and large, the experiences of the *colonia's* youth in the services have been satisfying ones. Unlike Negro youth, they have not found, in uniform, a denial of the democracy for which they are asked to fight.⁶ Few are commissioned officers, but many have had the satisfaction of working up to the top of non-commissioned ranks. They have made close friends among Anglo-Americans. They have, in some cases, married into Anglo-American

⁶ Earl Brown and George C. Leighton, *The Negro and the War*, Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 71 (New York: Public Affairs Committee, Inc., 1944). Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, Harper, 1944, Vol. I, pp. 419-423; Vol. II, pp. 1308-1309.

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families from other parts of the country and have found that the social prejudices of Descanso did not exist. They have found that they can do things well, that they can command and take responsibility. Even the misfits and comparative failures feel that they have been judged, not as "Mexicans," but as individual men, by the same standards as other men. The successful have had the heady experience of accomplishment free of the tag "pretty good for a Mexican." They are, as they say, "all steamed up."

A pharmacist's mate said: "The years on the ship are the best ones I ever spent. When you learn to get on with a thousand men and do your work and hold your own without ever hearing 'Mexican,' you get on to a lot of things. In a way, I wish I could stay with the Navy. I hope they don't discharge me right now on account of this leg. If I came back to the colony now, I think I'd blow up after a few months. Two weeks is bad enough. It's like breathing good, clean air—salt air, maybe—and then getting back to a swamp. I'd like to finish the war. Then there'll be a lot of us back together." A former corporal in the ground forces said: "I've had a swell time and I've been treated swell. The rest of the United States isn't like Descanso, I've found out. I'd like to live in the East—I've got a girl there. But you couldn't move my mother, and I've got to help her until the kids are grown. My girl says she wouldn't mind living in the *colonia*, but she's just dumb. She thinks it's romantic or something. I'd sure hate to risk it." A discharged private in the infantry said: "I'm glad I'm going to have one of those little buttons to wear in my coat. And a flock of foliage to put on my uniform for Armistice Day parades. I'm going into politics. There's seven or eight of us, all from Southern California, who've talked it over. Things are going to happen in these colonies, and we're going to see that they do."

It is true that great potential leadership developed among Mexican-American youth in the armed forces. If it keeps its drive, many barriers may go down before it. Its effect on the youngsters still in school is already great. The caustic comments of the returned veteran on *Mexicanismo* make it seem what it really is—a ridiculous, antiquated day-dream. Accommodating leadership is just a way of getting yourself fooled, to the veteran.

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Being a *pachuco* is just being a little punk. Getting an education is all-important. "Why, if I'd had a decent education, I bet I'd have been a captain." And as for the other side of town—but here the fresh voice of confidence and direction wavers.

The alert and mature veteran realizes that, in spite of all he can do and say, dominant Descanso is dominant. When he walks down Monticello Avenue, he feels the pressure of all the old childhood patterns of restriction, defeat, and helplessness. He feels, as one young ex-sergeant said, "as if something was being taken away, like I wasn't myself the way I am in camp." If there is a severe depression, followed by a fascism which takes it out on minority groups, where would the veteran who has returned to the *colonia* be? He is already handicapped, en masse, by insufficient education. Would he be one of the discouraged, broken cynics, like many a veteran of the first World War—at home only in a bar? Would he be a contributor to a crime wave like that which followed the last war? Or would he be like the youthful European veteran of 1918, rioting in the streets? The steam is up. The veteran knows the channels into which he would like to have it go: a good job, a happy family life, and full status in American life for his group. Where it actually goes is something dominant Descanso and the nation of which it is a part will determine. By the portents now observable, the veteran is not going to be put off with *atole con el dedo*; but sometimes he mistrusts, not only life and the times, but the power of his own newly acquired manhood to hold out against pressure.

EPILOGUE

"It Will All Work Out in Time"

DESCANSO is still convinced that, if no one had ever started talking about "minority problems," there would be none. "Why, I've lived here all my life," said a business man, "and I'll wager the Mexican wouldn't have known he had a problem, if some of you researchers and surveyors hadn't started telling him so." "It's just all this unrest due to the war," said a public official. "It's just the last three years we've been getting this agitation, and I think it's due to quiet down when things get back to normal." "I believe in being fair to everyone," said an elderly club-woman, "but I believe the solution of these racial questions is just to stop all this talk about them. You never heard this talk a few years ago. There wasn't any racial problem then." "The trouble is, people are trying to rush this equality thing," said another businessman. "It takes time, and time with a big T. We won't see it in my lifetime, nor in yours either." "It will all work out in time," says Descanso, practically in chorus, "if we just don't do anything about it."

The efficacy of time as a solution for something we don't want to face is a cherished human illusion. The small boy who will pick up his toys in "just a minute, if you don't rush me" hopes that, somehow, they will get picked up without him. The drifter in life who hopes something will turn up wants time to give him an easy reward. The man who chucks the unpaid bills in the bottom desk drawer wishes, most ardently, that time would outwit his creditors. As with individuals, so with nations and groups, and the boneyard of history is full of those who hoped that time would solve their problems. Return to the inorganic—liquidation—is the only solution time has to offer. Human invention and adaptability, working things out, depend upon factors other than time.

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When the pressure of events makes it obvious that solutions cannot wait for time, the harried human often turns to the panacea, the facile partial measure. The small boy picks up *some* of his toys, the debtor pays *some* of his bills. Both are strong on good intentions—*some* day they will really tackle the problem. Nations patch up malfunctioning economies, decadent political systems, and outworn institutions. Some day they will really remodel themselves—if the day of reckoning does not arrive first. Days of reckoning have been arriving with increasing historical frequency in the twentieth century, and their results have been, if not national oblivion, at least bloody convulsion. The lessons of adaptation have curriculum priority for the human species. If they cannot, or will not, be learned readily, there is always the hard way.

Descanso has its own version of the panacea, for minority problems. It is "education." "Don't you think the only solution for all these difficult racial questions is education?" "I feel we can't do anything until we study the problem more." "You can't rush these things—it takes a long, long time to educate people." Certainly there is nothing wrong with education, sans quotation marks. All living is education, and all history marks the drawing out and unfolding of man's abilities. We probably begin our education *in utero* and certainly with our first breath. This, however, is not the kind of education Descanso is talking about. It is not even talking about the kind of education, administered through a school system or adult education lectures, which is factual, provocative, and concerned with seeking real solutions. Descanso has not yet learned its a-b-c's on genetics and culture, nor does it want to be "stirred up" by hearing them. From the best sort of education in minority matters, that which combines theory with practice, it turns with a shudder.

The sort of education Descanso has in mind is scarcely even a panacea; it is, rather, pure escapism. Its generic ancestors were those illustrated lectures on the quaint customs of the Peruvians or the talks on "Enchanting Mexico, Land of Song and Dance." Its *parientes* are those long-winded civic discussions of delinquency and problems, where much is said and nothing is done. The club hour which is long on arts and crafts; the study group

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before which a few Mexican-American children decked in costume perform a folk dance; the missionary circle soaking itself in platitudes about "our less fortunate brethren"—this is the sort of education Descanso likes. The farther the subject material is removed in geographical distance, the longer action on a contemporary problem is deferred, the better.

If all the aimless, vaguely well-intentioned talk about "getting on with our neighbors," "expressing the democratic ideal," or "acting in a true Christian spirit" could be piled in a visible heap, its height would rival that of the sierras behind Descanso. The few little pebbles at the bottom would be the expression toward minority groups, in daily action, of neighborliness, democracy, and Christianity. Descanso likes to think that this mountain of words is just preparation, that it is actually "getting ready to do something." It might well bear in mind the words of William James:

When a resolve or a fine glow of feeling is allowed to evaporate without bearing practical fruit, it is worse than a chance lost; it works so as to positively hinder future resolutions and emotions from taking the normal path of discharge.¹

When Descanso's club hours and study groups are eager to hear of scientific findings on race and culture, of ways and means of eliminating prejudice, and of specific needs in its own backyard, the community will have taken a step toward education. When it experiments with putting theory to specific action, on a practical, everyday level, education will be actually occurring.

Meanwhile, the times themselves educate Descanso. More than in 1910, it is in touch with the thought of the nation and of the world. It may be resisting and reluctant, but it is not unaware. Its feeling that minority problems came into being about three years ago is its own response to the tensions and difficulties which, throughout the nation and the world, presage the passing of crude prejudice. Descanso, whether it knows it or not, is in the process of changing its mind. The process, not easy for individuals, is a critical one for communities. The evasions and half-measures, the frantic attempts to escape into the past or the

¹ William James, *Selected Papers on Philosophy*, Dutton, 1917, p. 63.

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geographically distant, the effort to shut one's ears, the deferrals and time-borrowing techniques are all part of the process. They are the forerunners of critical decision. The decision, Descanso half suspects, has already been made by history. Its own throes are that of acceptance.

It is odd that the idea of the worth of the individual and his right to equal opportunity should prove such a bitter dose for Descanso to swallow. The concept has no shock of novelty, certainly. It was given expression almost two thousand years ago by a citizen of a small town in the Near East, and a great deal of lip-service is given to His teachings in Descanso's churches and public assemblies. Eighteenth century Europe produced a dramatic affirmation of the concept, and that affirmation, embodied in the constitution of a nation, permeates the legal and political structure of many a Descanso. Had the concept ever been given full expression—allowed to rule in fact as in theory—the particular need for the decision Descanso is facing would never have arisen.

What has diluted the ideal, expressed in these two fashions, which Descanso holds as its most cherished ideological possessions? It might be well to inquire, because the factor which altered the ideal is probably the factor which is causing Descanso's present pain. The statements of two thoughtful citizens of Descanso furnish a clue. A minister, more forthright than many, said: "You know, when I want my congregation to do something, I don't get anywhere by appealing to their Christian principles. When I do that, I'm just making a noise like a preacher—it goes in one ear and out the other. But if I appeal to their fear of 'losing face' or their hope of monetary gain, the response is immediate. I don't want to sound cynical—I feel I can honestly say that Christian principle is a great restraining influence, but for action on a crucial matter, the other appeals are what work." An elderly jurist said: "Now that I've retired, my family feel I ought to write some reminiscences. I'm not so sure. When I look back, it seems to me I've seen one dog fight after another, with the odds on the biggest and heaviest dog, too often. All scrambling for top place. Sure, things would be worse without

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a democratic tradition, but it's a pretty faint appeal a lot of the time. Self-interest is what really moves people."

Descanso often likes to describe life in terms of a dog fight—"top dog" and "under dog," or "dog eat dog." It says that you "have to look out for number one" and "keep your eye on the bacon." "If you start to slip, you're lost," it says of the competitive battle, but on the other hand, "if you get a sucker, pound his head." In these and a thousand other nervous, cruel phrases, it describes what seems to it the battle of life. This battle is not between the Good and the Evil, or the powers of light and the powers of darkness, but between those who get status and money and those who don't. Those who lose can "take up" religion as a consolation or "fall for this stuff about men being brothers," but for those still competing both Christianity and democracy seem truly secondary. "Don't try anything you can't get away with," is a more frequent ethical admonition.

Many observers have remarked the extreme individual competitiveness upon which our society, as well as the whole of western civilization, is based. To it have been ascribed many of the hostilities, insecurities, and fears from which we suffer. Competition in moderation is an excellent thing, stimulating and quickening. Taken in small doses, it can add zest and interest to labor, fresh enjoyment to recreation. Taken in heroic prescription, it is probably as fatal as most stimulants. When the primary goal of a culture, and of the individuals in it, becomes "getting ahead of someone," it is quite possible to agree with the psychiatrist who characterized extreme competition as "carrying the germs of destructive rivalry, disparagement, suspicion, begrudging envy into every human relationship."²

Descanso may have a tradition of free-and-easy western ways, but it is not a relaxing town. Its people look as hard-bitten and driven, in many ways, as do the dwellers of large cities. Beneath the casual, friendly manners of small community residents, they display the tensions of those who "have their eye on the main chance." They are eternally watchful, to see who got ahead of someone, to see that no one gets ahead of them, or to look for

² Karen Horney, *New Ways in Psychoanalysis*, Norton, 1939, p. 173.

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signs of the "slipping" that is so feared. It is a society where constant, invidious comparison is the rule; because, obviously, you can check your own status by seeing who is above you and keeping an eye on those below you. A group which is permanently assigned a lower position offers great psychological release, in this game. As they will always be "lower," so you will always be "ahead." When self-mistrust and fear of failure creep up, the permanent "lowers" provide convenient targets on which to vent uneasiness.

Extreme competitiveness does not mix well with equality and fraternity, no matter how the latter are ideologically sanctified. Descanso, however, is not ready to admit that the mixture is incompatible. It fears to modify the aggressive competition—it might "lose out," somehow. But neither will it give up its idealistic tradition—that is too cherished, too much a part of its fiber. To date, it has preferred to dilute and modify the ideals to meet the demands of competition. The solution has been dangerously thin at times, but never, as yet, sufficiently so to blur entirely the concept of individual worth and dignity. The appeal to treat an individual man "like a human being" scarcely ever fails of response. It is in its thinking toward groups that Descanso gets careless, intent on competitive goals, and so falls into circuitous modifications and denials of its principles.

Descanso will have to undergo considerable degeneration before it will ever strike with its fists, but it will have to experience distinct regeneration before it ceases to do damage—real damage—with its elbows. It may realize that the principles have taken about all the dilution they can stand, and that this is the time to turn about and modify the structure of intensive competitiveness. Western civilization, as a whole, stands at that turn. It is not a matter of pretty speeches and "idealistic dreams," but a matter of survival. Blind competition can, and will, destroy us all. The possibility creeps closer every day, implemented by the terrifying efficiency of warfare. Co-operation has become, not a fancy day-dream, but an unavoidable necessity.

Descanso has heard this. What, it asks, can it possibly have to do with the *colonia* and minority problems, with who gets a job and who uses a swimming pool? Secure in its half circle of moun-

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tains, Descanso will lend an ear to "international co-operation," because it is not directly involved. What happens in its own backyard is its own affair, it feels, which "time" or "education" or "getting back to normal" can be trusted to work out. Descanso has never responded very strongly to suggestions that international relations depend, to a considerable extent, upon treatment of national minorities within the United States, nor has it felt that minority co-operation—national unity—was an essential factor in winning a war. Both appeals were made, it felt, by people who wanted to "stir things up." What happened in the *colonia* or the *barrio pequeño* was Descanso's own business!

To change the basis of Western civilization from excessive competitiveness to a safe margin of co-operativeness sounds like a large, abstract undertaking. How are such things done? By parliaments and congresses ratifying treaties, trade agreements, security pacts, and the like? Only in part. The psychology of the nations behind these bodies determines what they will do; the legal bodies are only instruments. Nations are merely agglomerations of thousands of Descansos. If the feeling in these smaller units is that life is a snarling dog fight, that it is important only to "come out ahead," that one's advantage is the disadvantage of others, this feeling will be reflected in the way the nation conducts its affairs. If you exploit at home, you will do it abroad. If ultimate community standards are "what you can get away with," national standards will be no higher. "Destructive rivalry, disparagement, suspicion, and begrudging envy" may very well be the rule of the international conference, and, if they are, survival itself is threatened. A reasonable amount of self-interest is by no means incompatible with co-operation; the alternative to unchecked competition is not, as Descanso is apt to imagine, that of being a masochistic doormat, "letting people walk all over you." But the price of survival is now the limiting of hostility, aggression, and rabid self-interest.

It should seem to Descanso "just good common sense." If it does not, heavens knows what further harsh lessons are needed. What Descanso cannot see yet—what it strains and shies from—is the idea that its own backyard is in any way involved. It cannot visualize itself as the common denominator. It cannot see how

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the seeds which are sown at home, in the simple pursuit of "looking out for number one," produce bloody international flowers a decade or two later. A glance at the Düsseldorf, Aachens, and Munichs should convince anyone that a nation can be no better than the courage and vision of its common citizens. In Germany, the dog fight of competition reached its lowest depths. It drew in the whole world, but it started in the backyard. Descanso is quite sure that it could never be a Düsseldorf, and it is quite right. Descanso will start its vicious cycle in its own manner, quietly using its elbows, half unconscious of what it is doing, diluting its ideals little by little instead of repudiating them flamboyantly. It is at the turn where it can do this, or where it can begin to practice the attitudes which are necessary for the survival of the Western world.

What happens to the *colonia* and the Mexican-American is not so important as what happens to Descanso itself, except as the two are inextricably intertwined. Descanso's fancy that it is making a large, generous gesture by granting civil rights and equal opportunity, by "doing something for the downtrodden" is a pretty idea, but the facts do not support it. The *colonia* does not want to be the recipient of Christmas baskets and patronage, and the dominant community would not get what it needs by making such gestures. The only person Descanso needs to "do anything for" is itself. It needs to get rid of its fears, its self-doubts, its meretricious standards, and its hostile suspicions. When any society reaches the point where it feels the need of a permanently depressed lower group, someone to look down on and vent spite on, it is getting sick. The damage it does to itself is much greater than any damage it can do to the lower group.

The end product of the culture which glorifies excessive competition is this self-mistrust—it has to look down at something in order to be sure of itself. It cannot stand on its own merits. It has to have "inferior" peoples to assure itself of its own ability, and it sets up mechanisms for keeping those peoples "inferior." This is a long way from the healthy competition we have thought of as the ideal, not only for sports, but for life, where everybody has a fair chance, where handicaps neutralize inequalities, and where playing "clean" is more important than constant victory.

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The United States has come dangerously close to the cultural self-doubt which has to have a scapegoat, to the snarling competition where dogs eat dogs and nothing else matters. The Mexican-American is only one of many minorities; Descanso is only one of many towns. Local details may vary, but the basic pattern does not. Once caught in this swirl of vicious emotion, the way out is not easy. Time often makes things worse, as old habits dig deeper, and one incident leads to another. What is done naïvely at first, is done with a vengeance later. Soon the society which has so involved itself cannot imagine any other way of action. It seems right and natural, cruel and perverted as it may appear to outsiders.

It is greatly to the credit of this nation that it has caught itself up short. The courageous and consistent fight being waged against racism and scapegoating is spreading. It is beginning to bear fruit in such practical ways as the removal of discriminatory legislation, improved economic and educational opportunities for minorities, and in the growing conviction that crude prejudice is simple ignorance. But its relation to the competitive basis of our culture is less well understood, and, until such awareness is common knowledge, all gains are still in danger. The crisis will come during the economic adjustments of the postwar period.

The United States, like Descanso, stands at a turn. It can develop workable patterns for limiting hostility and aggression, and start the experiment right at home, in every one of its community test tubes. Or it can let the devil take the hindmost, while every man, acting for himself, sees only the goal of being ahead of someone else. Whatever the attitudes and behavior patterns of its citizens are, such will be the expression of a nation. And the dominance of this nation being what it is, the man on the street of Descanso may very well determine what will happen to the world.

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